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To Florence,
with much love,
from Harry

Oct. 21st. 1893.

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AS IT IS IN HEAVEN

BY

LUCY LARCOM

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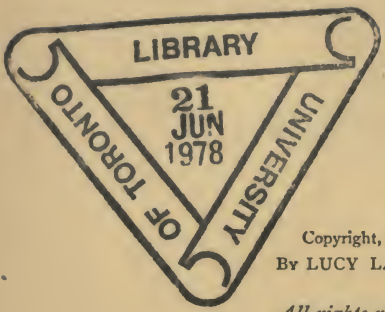

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The Riverside Press, Cambridge, Mass., U. S. A.
Electrotyped and Printed by H. O. Houghton & Co.

To P. F.

THE INSPIRING TEACHER AND FRIEND

OF MY EARLY WOMANHOOD

THIS LITTLE BOOK IS DEDICATED BY

HER GRATEFUL PUPIL

PREFACE

WE all have our intimate books, as we have our intimate friends. They are not always the greatest or the wisest that we know, but we like them to think and talk with, or to be silent with ; to have near us, simply because they are they, and we are ourselves. This one will be little to any reader, unless it is admitted to the close intimacy and seclusion of thoughtful hours. It dares to touch high themes, — as a friend may, when, alone with friend, conversation deepens into communion.

Extracts of some length are introduced, as persons conversing might draw other and wiser persons into their conference, leaving them full freedom of speech. Three authors most largely quoted are E. H. Sears,

J. H. Thom, and George MacDonald. Other writers as well known appear in an occasional paragraph; and familiar poets here and there give clearness and emphasis to a thought that was striving for expression.

The intention of the book is spiritual rather than literary. Heaven is written of, — the character of the heavenly life rather than its conjectured conditions; the heaven that enters into our human relations to purify them and prepare them for a higher development; the heaven that is to be lived on earth, making whatever glorious life we may pass into hereafter both dear and familiar; so that

"When Time's veil shall fall asunder,
The soul may know
No fearful change, nor sudden wonder,
Nor sink the weight of mystery under;
But with the upward rise, and with the vastness grow."

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AS IT IS IN HEAVEN

I.

Our Father and His Family.

UR Father." Until we feel the meaning of these two simple words, we can have no true perception of what heaven is. That little pronoun "our" is the key to all blessedness, above and below. It unlocks the door of every human heart for the admission of every other member of the great family of humanity. We leave our egotism and isolation and selfishness behind us whenever we sincerely utter these first words of our Lord's prayer.

"He setteth the solitary in families." The human father is given to us as a dim revelation of the heavenly one. The baby

catches its earliest glimpse of heaven through the blended look of tenderness in its father's and mother's eyes, and the children grow up together, bound to each other and to their parents by ties of love and obedience that foreshadow their deeper relations to their fellow-beings and to God. For love of the Best and obedience to the Highest are essential to the existence of heaven. God cannot make a dwelling-place for Himself where these are not.

"Our Father *who art in heaven.*"

If heaven were a region which could be mapped out by definite descriptions and geographical boundaries, it would no longer be heaven to us, but only another earth. The sky above us symbolizes heaven because of its limitlessness. The mind refuses to think of the starry spaces as bounded. We cannot believe that in exploring them we may at last come to a wall which shuts the universe in upon itself. The infinite is more comprehensible to us than the finite. The habitation of

God must be everywhere. But it is a spiritual habitation, which we can enter only as spiritual beings.

What "place" may signify to us when we shall have ceased to inhabit our mortal bodies, we cannot guess; but if there be any meaning in the term which the Apostle Paul so distinctly uses — "a spiritual body" — spirit and form can never be separated from each other; their union is sacred and eternal. It was not mere sentiment, but the utterance of tenderest human sympathy and divinest knowledge, — the assurance of Jesus to his sorrowing disciples, "I go to prepare a place for you: that where I am, there ye may be also." He bade his friends still to send up their hearts' wishes to Him, after He should have gone out of their sight.

Prayer is the door forever open between earth and heaven. Sooner than sound can reach a human ear through this lower atmosphere, the longing desire of the spirit rises to the heart of the Eternal Friend.

Before the petition has found shape in words, the Parent-Soul has heard and answered His offspring-soul. Whether we believe it or not, we are living in an invisible world, where our wishes are understood before our words are spoken.

In our hurried repetitions of the Lord's Prayer, we forget what promises of our own are involved in the intensely human requests we are making in its three opening clauses, and how closely they all are interblended with that first thought of Our Father, and of ourselves as His children. We sometimes repeat the words as if we were asking God to do something for us without our coöperation, even though they so plainly announce duties that we solemnly bind ourselves to perform.

It is but mockery to say "Hallowed be Thy Name!" while we are treating any child of His with indifference or contempt; for the Name of God is also the name of our common humanity. In heaven the name is no arbitrary appendage; it is the

Person, the Being. To hallow God's name is not merely to repeat it with reverence: it is to recognize His lineaments and to honor Himself in every one of our brethren; or if in any His image seems lost or obscured, to pray and strive with them to have it restored.

Nor are we sincere in saying, "Thy Kingdom come!" while we are living only for our own pleasure, in selfish indifference to the welfare of others. On the lips of Christ this was no listless, half-hearted wish. He tells us that "the Kingdom of heaven suffereth violence;" that our utmost energy of body and soul, our most eager and unwearying activity must be given to hasten its coming. If we can look on idly while injustice and oppression and greed of gain are crushing human lives around us, — if we are taking to ourselves more than our fair share of the means by which all were intended to find their healthful and natural development, — if we are unwilling to sacrifice our own small

interests to the larger good of the children of the Kingdom, our hearts are false to the words of our prayer.

We say "Thy will be done!" sometimes with almost abject submission; but it is rather a prayer of earnest and fervent consecration. We do not really wish that the will of God may be done, unless we intend to do it with heart and soul and mind and strength; — even as Christ entered the world saying with every throb of his being, "Lo! I come to do thy will, O God!" Thus only can the will of God be done on earth as it is in heaven.

And so, when we utter this heaven-breathing prelude to the more personal requests that follow, — if we have indeed received the Spirit of Him who is the Voice of our universal humanity, — we are saying that with Him we do hallow the Name of God in our thoughts and actions; that within our souls His Kingdom of love and righteousness is begun; that we are doing His will from the heart, as the one joy of our lives.

We know little of the angels, yet we do know that these petitions which Our Lord taught us must also be in their hearts and upon their lips as they look down upon us and are perplexed by "the riddle of the painful earth." With what patient, pitying wonder must those who have never known anything but the love and obedience of heaven lean earthward, longing to pierce our darkness with their light! Let us comfort ourselves with the thought that somewhere there are beings living so close to their Father's heart that they have no wish apart from Him, and are always faithfully and successfully doing His will. What we are attempting with weary struggles, with falterings and failures, they are steadily bringing to pass.

Imagine for a moment what it would be for us to obey God without the least reference to self, — without our usual small satisfactions with our own methods, and our petty measurements of the methods of others, — without our mean craving for

approbation or reward, — without our mockery of humility, our belittling vanity and pride, — without our hesitating cowardice and our headstrong rashness, — but simply, spontaneously, unreservedly following His impulses within us, and going forth on His errands as if there were no joy for us in doing anything else than this. How fresh and free, how wholesome and glad the vision that opens before us, of those who have escaped from the thralldom of their own will, and are released into the liberty of the sons of God! What inspiration for us, to know that we may learn to do His will on earth, even as it is done by the child-hearted, obedient angels!

Separate thoughts, hopes, plans, ideas peculiar to themselves they must have, else were they not their Father's children, each a distinct and unique expression of His life, and each meant to fill a place for which no other being in His universe is fitted. But among them no impulse needs to be stifled, no purpose changed: God-

born, each thought and feeling takes at once harmonious shape, and becomes a full, clear note in the perfect hymn of the spiritual creation.

These are our heavenly neighbors. We cannot see how close they sometimes pitch their tents beside our earthly tabernacles. We feel their eyes upon us, but we are less acquainted with them than the earth is with her surrounding stars. One human life, however, has been lived in their companionship; Jesus Christ could speak of himself as "the Son of man, which *is* in heaven." He was in conscious union with these his invisible brethren, and sometimes the clouds were swept apart, and voices were heard, and faces were seen out of the inner glory, and words of that high communion of work and worship fell upon mortal ears, and sank into human hearts that only faintly comprehended their meaning.

To us also come transfiguration-moments. They are rare; they are too daz-

zling to be constantly borne by our weak vision; but they are the true illumination of our lives. Their light is left in our souls that we may see to work more faithfully, knowing that we toil not alone, knowing that the eyes of our freer fellow-servants are upon us, that their hands are helping us, and that the lowliest service which we heartily render to the least of God's children here, is one with the lofty enterprises which occupy the energies of these holy beings, within His invisible Kingdom of Light and Love.

They bend toward us, in sympathy with our little conflicts and sacrifices, even as their souls were stirred toward our Master, in wonder at the approaching accomplishment of His glorious mission to mankind. And while He weaves our humble work into His, our hearts acknowledge Him as the Centre of all aspiration and endeavor: we find in Him the key to our largest, holiest relationships, — "Our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named."

II.

The Heaven that Is.

AS it is in heaven." The words slip thoughtlessly from our lips : as our Lord spoke them, they gave a diviner meaning to the whole of His perfect prayer. They are the atmosphere in which every one of its beautiful, familiar petitions blooms like a separate flower. The fragrance of His native air, the climate of heaven in which His soul was breathing while He walked in a visible form upon the earth, suffused whatever wish or thought He had for the world He loved ; and through this pervasive sweetness, ever since its first utterance, the Lord's prayer has held its place in human hearts as the universal prayer. When his friends asked Him what they should pray for,— the most natural answer, the only answer He could

give them was, "Pray that earth may be like heaven."

It was as if He said, "Love my Father as *our* Father, — hallowing His Name in the lowliest of His Children as in Me, and doing His will in all things, little and great, and you will know what heaven is, for you will be living in it with me. His Kingdom will then have come on earth as it is in heaven." It is like a traveler from an enlightened nation visiting some outcast colony of his countrymen who had become degraded by yielding through long generations to savage habits, arousing them to shame at their brutish condition by telling them of the beautiful home-life they had forgotten, and so reviving in them the wish to cultivate its dear, forsaken humanities, even in exile.

For earth is nothing in itself; it is alive only through heaven, — the heaven from which it can no more be separated than the human body can exist apart from the breath of life which God has breathed into

it, or than this glad, fruitful world could be a home for growing organisms without the encircling air by whose mysterious movements it is penetrated and sustained. As dead and dreary as a planet without an atmosphere is the life that knows itself only in its externals, in its relations to things alone, without the spirit through which they unfold into realities. It is almost sadder than to have no life at all, to live as if the outside of it were the whole. It is dreadful to breathe God's breath, and not become by it a living soul.

Heaven *is*. Around us all things are wavering, sinking into illusion and decay. We want to stand on firm ground. Heart and soul and flesh cry out for the living God — for that which is permanent and real. We cleave to the Name by which God revealed Himself to His ancient people — "I Am" — as the Name wherein our own immortality is hidden. We are unsatisfied until we can find the *I am* in ourselves, — in our human life, throughout

all its associations and experiences. God — Life — Heaven — these are no deceits of the senses. In our soul of souls we are sure that they are "the things that cannot be shaken."

We are both spirit and form, and we can only become acquainted with spirit through form, with the invisible through the visible. And around us the spiritual is everywhere trying to express itself through what we call the natural. If we knew how to look for it, we should everywhere find the heavenly hidden in earthly things. It has been wisely written, that "no man ever conceived of spirit without form, or of anything without form, for the simple reason that no one has the power of suspending the laws of thought. Form and substance are co-essentials of each other. As they cannot be separated in the nature of things, so it is not in the power of any one to separate them in his idea."

Living in the human form, and in a world of forms not unrelated to ours, it is

the one quest for us all, to find not only their relations to us and to each other, but also to make our way through them to the substance within and beyond them, to that through which alone they have reality. To comprehend spirit and form in their eternal harmony, — to live in their true relations to each other, is to have won the secret of Life.

This thought is not fanciful, but most practical. We can do nothing well, without a recognition of the inseparable union of form and spirit. In it lies the secret of all right expression. A poet has said —

> "Natural things
> And spiritual, — who separates these two
> In art, in morals, or the social drift,
> Tears up the bonds of nature and brings death.
> "Without the spiritual
> The natural 's impossible ; — no form,
> No motion ! Without sensuous, spiritual
> Is inappreciable ; — no beauty or power !
> And in this twofold sphere the twofold man
> Holds firmly by the natural, to reach
> The spiritual beyond it, — fixes still
> The type with mortal vision, to pierce through

> With eyes immortal to the antetype
> Some call the ideal — better called the real,
> And certain to be called so presently,
> When things shall have their names."

True it is that the earthly cannot comprehend the heavenly, because the earthly has no life in itself. But heavenly character can fill these earthly moulds with living forms. For Earth also belongs to God, and perhaps only waits our coöperation with Him, to become pliant to His touch as clay to the artist's hand and thought ; no longer inanimate dust, but the revelation of a beautiful ideal. In the clods we tread beneath our feet there are imprisoned angels waiting for release.

We think of heaven as something that must visit us from afar, replacing with unimagined wonders our familiar surroundings, a new creation for which new capacities must be created within us. But the new heaven and the new earth will only be the unveiling to us of what already is. It is only our blindness that needs to be

removed — only our spiritual faculties that need to be awakened.

We are too much in the habit of looking forward to heaven as to something that *will be*, — an easier, pleasanter story for us to read when we have finished this tiresome earth-narrative, — a luxurious palace-chamber to rest in after this life's drudgery is ended, — a remote celestial mountain-retreat where the sound of the restless waves of humanity forever fretting their shores will vex our ears no longer. And so we stumble on, pitying ourselves for the hard times we have to endure on earth, and singing our songs of the "sweet by-and-by," as if there were some saving merit in having patience with time, and in dreaming of a broader and happier realm that we call eternity. But the eternal issues are now and here, in our thoughts and deeds, in our simple, common, every-day relations to God and to our fellow-beings. To-day, or never, — here, or nowhere, — is eternity.

We know nothing of life, — of God's life or of our own, — and we have no real life but His, — except by living it. The foundations of heaven are laid in human character. The precious stones upon which the Holy City is built are the lives which, according to their own distinctive nature, receive and transmit the light of the Divine Life, each with a different lustre. The glory of God and of the Lamb, of the Father and the Son, is that City's perfect illumination. The celestial glory is the glory of love and truth and holiness. Without these there were no heavenly life, and therefore no heaven.

Holiness, truth, love, — these are the realities which are unseen and eternal. But they cannot be held as mere abstractions. They have no meaning to us except as personal attributes. Only *a person* can be righteous and loving and pure. In loving God, we love the One in whom these qualities are perfectly revealed. In seeking heaven, we seek the region where

they are recognized and welcomed as the supreme law. So God makes and abides in His own heaven, the heaven that He Himself is. And so is He, through all generations, the true and only dwelling-place of His children.

To live unlovingly, untruthfully, unrighteously, is to live outside of heaven, even though one should build a house for himself in the full dazzle of the Great White Throne: while the darkest corner of earth is heaven to him who is living the life of God therein, though he may be unaware of the glory that surrounds him.

Heaven *is*. Already its atmosphere touches this lower firmament; already the heavenly-minded breathe its air. The same love throbs in their hearts that stirs in the souls of those who have passed on beyond all mortal hindrances. A little while, and the realities in which they both live will be fully unveiled.

Surprises doubtless await us all, across the boundaries of this earthly existence.

But none, perhaps, will be more surprised than those humble, faithful, self-sacrificing souls who have often almost dreaded the strange splendors that might open upon them beyond the gates of pearl, when they find that it is the same familiar sunshine in which they have been walking all their days, only clearer and serener. They will wonder that they have no new language to learn, no new habits to form, almost no new acquaintances to make. They will at last discover what their humility hid from them here, that while on earth, without knowing it, they had already been living in heaven.

III.

Blending Atmospheres.

LOOKING out upon the landscape from the upper slopes of a high mountain, you cannot help seeing how the earth and the sky are always trying to blend with each other. They are like lovers who cannot stay apart. The breath of the valleys ascends in a soft mist that creeps up, up, to the highest mountain ranges, and gradually shapes itself into clouds; or it lies in long, clinging bands about their bases, and makes their summits appear like islands in an ethereal sea. And the sunset tints the clouds above and the mists below with one loveliness of color, and the wind weaves them together so delicately that you cannot tell which is mist and which is cloud. The lines of the horizon gradually vanish; river and valley

and mountain and mist intermingle and are fused in a glory behind and above them all, and greater than their own. A mountain sunset is like the marriage of the visible and the unseen, the new heaven and the new earth, the bride "descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God."

And when it all fades away, and the stars come out of the purple deeps above, the feeling of our human nearness to the infinite is intensified. In the loneliness of night on the mountain-top we comprehend something of our relationship to those heavenly spheres; we are at home on our own star, moving beside these radiant neighbors of ours through illimitable space.

The planets which give to our evening sky its chief splendor are but illuminated earth, of the same material as our own; as they shine for us, so we shine for them. We are one body and soul with them. The ether that throbs between seems to separate while it really unites us. Every par-

ticle of this solid world thus becomes luminous; every pebble that we heedlessly tread upon is precious, for it is of the very substance of the stars. The soul of the star is its light, that flows through it from some unguessed Beyond. And the soul of that light, of all living light, is Love. And love cannot be, without a Being who loves. God is at the heart of all beings and of all things, seeking to bring them into unity with each other, the unity of His love and peace. Nature and humanity are one in Him, and refuse to be put asunder.

Since we, too, can love, we know that we are of God in some more vital way than rocks or trees, or than our own bodies. But Love has no contempts. She sees all things in God, and she feels the throbbing of her own heart, the Life of God in her life, beating back to her through what are esteemed the meanest of His works.

"A weed, to him who loves it, is a flower."

And Love continually hears a sound as of human expostulation and entreaty coming

up to her from tangled and neglected wastes, which, to other ears, are buried in savage silence. The earthly palpitates with a dim consciousness of its heavenly affinities and possibilities, which will sometime be realized.

The mute eloquence of Nature around us is often most pathetic ; — the beauty that is everywhere taking crude shapes, trying to find expression. Sometimes this pathos is made audible to us through sweet, half-developed voices. Waters murmur ; winds whisper and moan ; grass and blossom and leafy bough sigh back to each other, like children who cannot tell what they want. The dumb rock tries to write out its message with hieroglyphic lichens. Sea-moss and fern conceal mystical secrets beneath their spreading fronds. The lowest forms of matter overflow with significance. Even the slimy ooze of the lake and the black coal in the mine hold an essence of purity within them which nurses the white life of the lily, and kindles

the sparkle of the diamond. Nothing is so dead that it does not seek utterance — that it does not strive to blend itself with some unattainable perfection above itself. The silence of Nature is an unuttered prayer for release — for reunion with her Source.

For Nature is not yet released from bondage, nor can she be while we permit ourselves to be bondslaves to her. We, whose birthright is the liberty of the children of God, desire a King for ourselves, — insist that Earth shall be our sovereign instead of our servant, binding ourselves down beneath her and with her in unnatural fetters, and so turning her palaces into dungeons. No wonder that the whole creation groans, being burdened.

It is one of the perplexing problems of our being, how to find our right relations to the natural world. In our best moods, we feel, with the good mediæval saint, that the sun and the moon and the elements are our brothers and sisters, children with

us in the same household. We cannot believe ourselves unrelated to anything that God has made, — and we are not. Yet matter is not spirit, nor is spirit matter, though neither can find its true life apart from the other. What if out of our purified human hearts are to be the issues of life to the lower natures which surround us?

"These material coverings which we wear" — writes the author of "Foregleams of Immortality" — "obey the law of the immortal man within them; let that be purged of evil and it will transform the whole outward nature, and make our material clothings fit to us as our robe of righteousness. Matter is neither good nor evil except as magnetized by the spirit within. . . . In that day when the savagery in men has been eliminated or softened down, the savagery in brute natures will be softened also, as reflecting his own nature back upon them; for there are fine invisible nerves that pervade all the

universe and run down from man into all the lower creation, and when he is himself redeemed will draw the lower creation towards him and harmonize it with him in one great atonement. For in just the measure that the lion in man's nature lies down with the lamb, just in the same measure will the peace be radiated on all things about him.

"There is a sort of sympathy of all Nature with all humanity. She copies out of man what is in him, that he may see himself face to face. And so her types beneficent will grow fairer to us, and sparkle with a more glorious beauty as we grow better and drink more largely the spirit of mercy; and her ugly deformities will grow more ugly if they become the looking-glass of our own mind. . . . Man's redemption is at the same time the redemption of all the creatures over which he has dominion, and the redemption of nature from the curse that lay upon it, for the curse is primarily in himself. Let his own heart and mind

become paradisiacal and he will enter Paradise again, for its light will be on the fields, the rivers and the mountains."

We are awed by the sacred responsibility God thus lays upon us, of being creators, with Him, of the new heavens and the new earth. His Spirit, breathed through us, shall make this sad, half-dead world feel within herself the stirrings of a living soul! His Spirit, Soul of our souls, Breath of our breath! Ah! beautiful it is to live through Him, in Him, — beautiful both for worlds and for souls!

We feel Him around us, above us, within us, — the pure exhilaration of immortality. The breath of the Spirit is like the air which is astir everywhere, — choked and smothered among the fetid growths of the marsh, free and untainted on the mountain-top. We cannot live among the miasmatic exhalations of the bog, nor can we breathe naturally upon summits clad in perpetual snow. Being human, we belong in zones where heaven and earth healthfully blend

their atmospheres; though we are seldom in danger, with our low earthly clinging, of ascending into ether too pure. It is from the highest heavens that earth and our souls must be continually refreshed; and there is no vigor like that we obtain from accustoming ourselves to the air of lofty spiritual altitudes.

Yet it is possible for righteousness to be too hard, and purity too cold. The flower will grow beneath the frowning rock, and even upon the fringe of the everlasting snows, — but not without the sun. It must have warmth as well as light and strength from the heavens. Love is the mother-heart of the sun to the blossom. Love is the fusing element of all life — the tremulous, softly-defined horizon-line that at once separates and unites the spheres, terminating our human vision; the trysting-place where earth and heaven meet. Beneath its tender atmospheric suffusions all imperfections are hidden and forgotten, as if they were not. Life is at one with

itself, in its incompleteness, in its aspirations and its prophecies.

The mysterious interblending of day and night in all vast, lonely expanses, appeals to a sense of deeper vastness within ourselves. Grand as nature is, it only typifies something grander in man; unconscious heights and breadths and depths within him, waiting to embosom themselves within the life and light of God. Seeking that ineffable oneness with Him, man and nature send up together one yearning response through the holy silence: "Grant us Thy peace!"

The sunset ebbs down the mountain-slopes, and village and wilderness fall asleep quietly side by side. Twilight touches all growths with its chrismal dews. Night falls softly upon the earth, revealing to us our near and glorious companionship of stars, and leaving us to float away with them through the solitudes of heaven. Home-lights twinkle up from the darkness below with a radiance indistinguishable

from the light of stars. Lifted into the overbrooding stillness, we feel only the throbbing of One infinite Heart. All things, — all souls of things, — are indissolubly one in the Eternal Love. Through all the universe there is no longer any sigh of separation.

"So when for us life's evening hour
Soft falling shall descend,
May glory born of earth and heaven
The earth and heavens blend ; —

"Flooded with peace the spirit float,
With silent rapture glow,
Till where earth ends and heaven begins
The soul shall scarcely know"

IV.

A Transparent World.

IN some moods, and to some natures almost habitually, Nature is an open secret. Looking into her mysteries, it is as if the gates between her and heaven were of transparent crystal instead of clouded pearl. This can only be when the spiritual vision is free from obscuring films. The prophet, the poet and the little child are alike in their peculiar insight: they see into things, and see them as they are, because their eyes are clear.

The ignoble prophet whom the heathen king called to curse Israel could only unfold the vision of blessing from the Almighty that he saw — "the man whose eyes are open." And Elisha, "the man of God," when his servant cried out in

despair at the sight of the surrounding Syrian army, had only to ask that the out-dazzling heavenly encampment which engirded them yet more closely might be shown him: — "Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see."

If the child sees heaven in its mother's eyes, not less does the mother in the child's. Who has not felt, in meeting the calm, wonder-lighted impenetrable earnestness of a baby's gaze, that if it had but words, it could reveal unfathomed secrets?

> "Heaven lies about us in our infancy."
> "Thou little Child," . . . . .
> . . . . "thou eye among the blind,"
> "That, deaf and silent, read'st the eternal deep,
> Haunted forever by the eternal mind," —
> "Thou, over whom thy immortality
> Broods like the day, a master o'er a slave,
> A Presence which is not to be put by."

What wonder that Wordsworth, himself a seer, should so often return to this idea of the seer-like intuitions of childhood, and through it should find highest assurance of the Divine approach to our humanity! —

"Thou, who didst wrap the cloud
Of infancy around us, that thyself
Therein with our simplicity awhile
Might'st hold, on earth, communion undisturbed."

The clear vision of childhood becomes gradually dimmed by earthliness, but beauty and truth remain within all forms, and the poet sees them "through a glass, darkly;" by signs and similitudes. Saint Paul was giving utterance to the deepest poetic reality, when he said that "the invisible things of Him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made." Nature is one vast metaphor, through which spiritual truth may be read. As our hearts harden with worldliness, we must be spoken to in parables. But to the children of the kingdom the hidden mysteries around them are continually unveiled. In nature, as in all things and everywhere, the pure in heart see God.

And the pure in heart not only see God themselves, but they become a medium for

transmitting His thoughts to others. It is at last as if God were thinking through every look and movement of the purified soul. And two souls whose vision has grown clear with His purity scarcely have need of speech when they meet. The crystal between them is without a film. They "know as they are known." All living things bear their messages from heart to heart, as from heaven to heaven.

Who knows what language may be among the angels? Their alphabet may be the intonations of the wind, the colors and odors of flowers, the changeful suffusions of sunset tints, or the musical dropping of twilight dews.

It is one of the greatest delights in life to spell out God's meanings in the visible world, or rather — for this is the privilege of all our Father's children — to lie in His bosom with our whole souls so open to Him that His thoughts shine through our being, seeming to us as if they were our own. Then His mountains lift us up with their

strength, His rivers flow through us with their freshness, and on His shoreless ocean we share the freedom of His infinity.

Said William Blake, "The man who in his mind and thought never traveled to heaven is no artist." "When the sun rises, I see, — not a round disc of fire, — but an innumerable company of the heavenly host, crying 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty.'"

"It is," writes one who while on earth looked far into heavenly things, "only a fulfillment of the deepest prophesyings of renovated souls — prophesyings that the poet and the artist utter in broken speech — when the Divine Revealers show us a spiritual world that transcends the natural: a world of forms and substances so much nearer in degree to spirit that they pulsate with its life and breathe with its fragrancy, and put on robes chromatic with all its beauty, and quick with all the rustlings of its love; a world of objective scenery, on which ever lies the sweet

morning-light of subjective peace; a world, therefore, whose leaf can never fade, and whose flower can never wither, because it wears the colorings of souls that are flooded with the life everlasting."

Another, sitting under his quiet roof-tree in the sunset of his years, hears the voice of God in the garden in the cool of the day, and meditates thus: —

"In cornfields and orchards, it is as though, from among the yellow corn and out of the tree-tops, it were said to thoughtful listeners, 'O taste and see that the Lord is good!' And the westerly wind is like a soft whisper out of the infinite, saying 'God is love; hope thou in Him!'"

Milton puts into the mouth of the fallen spirit, at his first glimpse of the newly created world, the envious cry —

> "O earth! how like to heaven, if not preferred
> More justly, seat worthier of gods, as built
> With second thoughts, reforming what was old!"

This was the spiteful bitterness of one who hated the perfection from which he

had made himself an outcast. Raphael, "the affable archangel," with the glory of the invisible throne still lingering on his brow, sees the resemblance, also, but only as a suggestion of the beauty which is unutterable. He says to Adam : —

> " What if earth
> Be but the shadow of heaven, and things therein
> Each to other like, more than on earth is thought ? "

Since nothing in the visible universe, so far as we know, is unrelated to the rest, — since everything created points upward to something higher than itself, impelled by some hidden power of growth, through an ascending series, almost as if matter were trying to find its way up to spirit, — since the visible is so evidently a foreshadowing of an invisible life, — it would be strange if there were not in-shinings downward through matter from that unseen realm. And that is what the poet and the seer and the believer do find, — spirit revealing itself through form — the invisible through the visible.

Mrs. Browning tells us —

"That not a natural flower can grow on earth,
Without a flower upon the spiritual side,
Substantial, archetypal, all aglow
With blossoming causes, — not so far away
That we, whose spirit-sense is somewhat cleared,
May not catch something of the bloom and breath,
Too vaguely apprehended, though indeed
Still apprehended, consciously or not."

Have we not felt the freshness of a cherub's cheek and breath in the wild-rose petal laid against our lips? Swinging upon her rock as if just alighted out of the sky, clad in translucent azure, have we not seen the harebell as a spirit, rather than as a flower? Who shall speak of the wild rose and the harebell as dying things, when the soul has once received their beauty and known it to be immortal? The grass withers and the flower fades; but their beauty was an utterance of the word of the Lord, and that must endure forever. It is only the earthliness of earth that decays; the spirit, the living form that was in it, lives on. That which revealed God in an

earthly image, re-blooming in the heavenly, will reveal Him forever. From every object that we look upon with love, we are gathering greater wisdom than we know; we are learning lessons that we shall never forget. A good man, previously quoted says, —

"In some age or other, I shall say of some heavenly marvel, perhaps, 'It is wonderful! wonderful!' And yet, in the earth it was hinted to me by the tones of the wind, and the way the clouds went over my head! I think perhaps every sight in the world that now is may avail us in the world that is to come. If I knew all that is to be learned from a daisy even, I should be less a stranger to God than I am. But I shall know it some time. All about me tree unto tree is uttering speech, and flower unto flower is showing knowledge. It is in a language that I do not well understand, but which I shall remember, and so shall learn the whole meaning of hereafter."

Well may a poet sing: —

> "Woo on, with odor wooing me,
> Faint rose, with fading core!
> For God's rose-thought that blooms in thee
> Will bloom forevermore!"

When Christ said "Consider the lilies!" He could not have been looking upon them as dying things, but as white radiances in the garden of God, bearing his message to mortals. Behind them he saw human spirits robed in purity and faith, the flower and the disciple growing up together in the light of God's love, and showing forth His glory. More than a figure it is when we speak of heaven as Paradise, — a garden, — a place of growths, where our spirits shall develop among other spiritual forms forever. To love, to learn, and to grow, — these three things the heavenly life must mean, wherever it is lived.

Nature becomes a divine study, when we see that things apparently inanimate are alive, and may claim a share in our immortality. Then everything that God

has thought it worth His while to create is seen to be sacred. And man at last —

> "By contemplating these forms
> In the relations which they bear to man,
> Shall discern how, through the various means
> Which silently they yield, are multiplied
> The spiritual presences of absent things.
> Science then
> Shall be a precious visitant; and then
> And only then, be worthy of her name,
> For then her heart shall kindle."

That time will surely come, and might come now for us, if we would open our eyes, — or rather, if we would but earnestly desire that they might be opened. Then we should see —

> "Every common bush a-fire with God.'

The stones of the wilderness would become to us a stairway for ascending and descending angels. We should say, in the desert which had seemed to us most dreary and barren, "Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not." "This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."

V.

The Human Mirror.

WE know the very first thought God had about us, before we came into visible existence; — "Let us make man in our own image." He thought it of humanity as a whole, and He thought it of every separate human being; for humanity is no abstract idea, but a family composed of individuals, each his Father's child. The grandeur of it! The thoughts of God are eternal, and so there never was a time when He was not thinking of us, His dear children who were to be. We were to be like Him. What that means we cannot fully comprehend, because finite creatures can form no conception of an infinite nature; yet we know that if we are truly His children, we must in some sense share His infiniteness.

In our childish endeavor to imagine what it means to be made in the image of God, we transpose the terms, and make a God in our own image, with all our mortal limitations and imperfections, — weak, partial, revengeful, tyrannical. This attempt to limit and describe God, to shape in the moulds of our petty comprehension Him who is invisible and incomprehensible, is at the root of all idolatry. It sounds arrogant to speak of ourselves as bearing the image of the Infinite One, but unless we do, we are not the children of our Father who is in heaven. And it is not arrogance but humility to feel and acknowledge that we have no life but His, and reverently to receive from Him our immortal inheritance. The lowliest wayside flower takes into its tissues all the endlessly free elements that compose the atmosphere; the eye, by its very construction, demands a boundless horizon; and the human spirit refuses to be fed from any but infinite sources. It is the little planet, shaped in the likeness of

the sun, absorbing and reflecting his inexhaustible overflow of light.

We must construct no gods for ourselves, with our hands or with our imagination. A soul's worship of the Infinite Soul allows no boundaries. We cannot define God, but our lives can be the mirror of His life; and that is the very purpose of our being.

If we alone among all the creatures in this world are made in the image of God, it must be through something wherein we are different from them — through the possession of a nature which can grasp moral and spiritual truth, and can shape itself thereby. In moments when we are truest to ourselves, we know that we are capable of this; and with this certainty a glimpse of the boundlessness of our being bursts upon us. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be." The children, when they see their Father more truly as He is, through loving Him will become like Him. But

they will never take in His full glory: it will be growing upon them and into them forever. And their humility must increase as they are drawn nearer to His Heart, the centre of His burning perfections. With the archangels who cry continually, "Holy, holy, holy Lord God Almighty," they will veil their faces as they sing His praise.

We are farthest away from God when we cannot perceive Him in our fellow-beings. The mirror of human nature is sadly blurred, but in the meanest and wickedest there are tokens of the Divine childhood; — occasional flashes of the Father's image through innumerable distortions. It is for us to show a clear reflection of His life in our own lives, before we judge others. And it is not for us to belittle ourselves by detecting flaws in those who by their character and actions most truly reveal Him to mankind. This is heaven on earth, — to see our Father's face in the faces of our brethren. There are those around us who do so reveal Him almost without a blur.

Few of us but can say, with gratitude to God —

"I know the face of him who with the sphere
Of unseen presences communion keeps;
His eyes retain its wonder in their clear
Unfathomable deeps.

"He brings the thought that gives to earthly things
Eternal meaning; brings the living faith
That even now puts on immortal wings,
And clears the shadow, Death."

These rare illustrations of human character are but the suggestion of possibilities that lie dormant in men who appear to us commonplace, — a term we should use far less frequently regarding any person if we kept in mind how crude and foolish we must all seem to natures above us, who have never failed to fulfil the laws of their being. Angelic intelligences, we are told, do desire to look into the developing capabilities of regenerate humanity. We are a mystery that interests them: and we, in all humility, might well take a reverent interest in those whom we now sometimes

pass by with supercilious glances. Mrs. Browning makes Aurora Leigh say

> "Look long enough
> On any peasant's face here, coarse and lined,—
> You 'll catch Antinoüs somewhere in that clay,
> As perfect-featured as he yearns at Rome
> From marble pale with beauty: then persist,
> And, if your apprehension 's competent,
> You 'll find some fairer angel at his back,
> As much exceeding him, as he the boor,
> And pushing him with empyreal disdain
> Forever out of sight."

Every human being, every form which was meant to reveal the presence of a soul, and so be a revelation of God, commands our utmost reverence. These are noble words of Novalis:—

"There is but one temple in the world, and that temple is the Body of Man. Nothing is holier than this high form. We touch heaven when we lay our hands on a human body."

Nor have we a right to think slightingly of any of our natural faculties or affections; since, so far as we know, our whole nature

is formed in the image of God. It is true that through some of these we seem related to the animal creation, — as if the stir of the Central Life eddied out to the extreme, unknown boundaries of visible and tangible being. All our powers have their low and their high, their earthly and their spiritual possibilities of expression. We know that we belong to God, by the inward consciousness that we can distinguish between these, — that we can recognize our Divine alliances. The human mirror has only then become hopelessly defective, when it confuses these eternal distinctions ; when it makes wrong appear as right, and evil as good.

Let this truth sink down into our hearts as a living, germinating seed. We have no human capacity which is unworthy of an immortal development. Whatever power or faculty is in us is God-given, and may claim a share in His eternity. Were it otherwise, some part of His work in His creation would be purposeless and vain.

If we have found out the secret of our human life at all — not alone in what we call its higher reaches, but in its every-day experiences — we have found that its humblest conditions overflow with immortal meanings: that the whole of it is "hid with Christ in God." If we sincerely pray that His Kingdom may come, we shall strive to do His will in all the commonplace corners and lowly chambers of our being, as well as in its widest expanses of free and joyous aspiration.

Especially is this idea of heavenly permanence applicable to our affections. Every outreach of life to life, every impulse of this God-born nature that finds its joy in giving what is richest and sweetest in its own being, and in receiving the same from other beings, is and shall be found by the purified heart to be as holy as it is human. Earthly desires are wrong only because of their perversions of the heavenly meaning that they inclose. The earth is still the Lord's, though it mixes itself so

strangely with the spiritual in our thoughts ; there, out of its own depths, crying and struggling painfully upward, longing to be released from the bondage of evil, and to share the adoption of the children of God.

Our sin lies in yielding the higher impulse to the lower ; so impeding the upward progress of the creation beneath us, and bringing about disorder and disintegration and ruin instead of harmonious union. The misery and the horror of sin is that by it the image of God in humanity becomes defaced, until sometimes it seems wholly obliterated. We speak of those who have given themselves up to their animal impulses as brutal ; but that is an insult to the brutes. Man cannot sink to their level without degrading himself far below them. Through his higher intelligence he becomes a fiend.

By every impulse within us, we were meant to ascend to the heavenly life. Every human affection, could it take the course God meant for it, would link us to

the angelic and the divine: and indeed, it is through our affections, perverted and misplaced as they often are, that we feel most profoundly our immortality. From her deepest intuitions Love declares to the beloved, —

> "Were not our souls immortal made
> Our equal love would make them such."

Emerson grandly says: "Neither is life long enough for friendship. That is a serious and majestic affair, like a royal presence, or a religion, and not a postilion's dinner, to be eaten on the run."

The word "passion" has been so misused and degraded that we scarcely know it except in its lower, earthlier acceptation. But passion is love energized, glorified with utter forgetfulness of self, — with an intense divine necessity of giving itself unreservedly in sacrifice and consecration to that which it loves. Our Lord's passion has made the word a sacred one to our human hearts. By that passion we have learned that God-like sacrifice is pos-

sible to our humanity, having been made real in a life like our own, through love that was stronger than death. God, in sparing not His own Son for our sakes, has revealed to us that the innermost depth and the uttermost overflow of love are essential to His being, and must therefore be so to ours.

By holy human character, by purity and devotion of soul like Christ's, and by these only, is the purpose of God in our creation made known. "We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the spirit of the Lord."

How beautiful it would be to live in a world where every being we met unconsciously revealed in look and word and action, in the slightest gesture and movement, the Divine intention in his creation! It is because little children do so, for the first brief months of their lives, that they charm us and captivate us. And it is in the sim-

plicity of being without dissimulation, and from the depth of our souls, just what we were meant to be, that we become as little children, and with them enter into the kingdom of heaven. The world seems to force us to put on masks and veils, — to hide what is most real in us behind some conventional caricature of ourselves. But both life and death strive with us, compelling us to show, if only by glimpses, what we truly are, as the children of God, and mirrors of His holy nature.

"Often from the depths of his being a man gives out a clear image of what he is at heart, of what he is in spirit, though his outward life, through stress of circumstance, may be feeble, broken, or discordant. And beyond this, even with those whose whole soul is most fully expressed in their outward life, the expression is at best only partial and prophetic ; there is always something more indicated, intimated, as the innermost beauty and goal of the spirit, that is not and as yet cannot be

expressed. There is no true life that does not reveal a purer, a richer and more blessed life visioned in its depths, seen like lovely grottoes in the deep, radiant with light beneath a heaving and a broken surface. Now that image is the true man, the real impress and outgoing of his spirit; and when mortality takes away the troubled setting of circumstance, that is the spiritual portrait which alone remains in our hearts. And those upon whom this spiritual stamp is strongest are those who when parted from us leave their real image with us, and as already caught up into heaven, speak to us of where they are, in the look of angelic beauty, the return of immortal youth, on the face of the dead who die in the Lord."

VI.

The Blessed Need.

THERE is no wider-spread misconception of heaven than that it is a place where all our wishes will be gratified. We criticise loftily the Mohammedan's dream of a sensual paradise, while our own thought of happiness hereafter is only a little less selfish. It is the mistake of hearts that were made for right desires, and that ought never to have had any other; but from that perfect condition, we know that we have gone very far astray. Our wishes have become our chief tempters and betrayers. Almost all the sorrow and degradation under which humanity groans is the result of gratified human desires, consciously or unconsciously perverted into inhuman ambitions and passions.

To insist upon having our wishes gratified, even when it does not cause deprivation and injury to others, involves the dwarfing of ourselves, the starving out of our diviner aspirations. Always to have our own way is not a blessing, but a curse. The indulged child is the spoiled child, most hopelessly spoiled in that he at last finds no satisfaction except in self-indulgence. The children of Israel refused bread from heaven, and cried out to God for flesh to eat. "And He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul." Scarcely a more awful retribution is recorded in the sacred Book. A surfeit of earthly enjoyment — quails preferred to manna — and spiritual starvation! The result is no less dreadful for being a natural sequence of events; the most miserable state of the soul's health is when it has lost its relish for heavenly food.

Getting, the gaining by mere accretion, is of the earth, and pertains to lower substances or growths, as rocks, clay, fungi,

and lichens. As things ascend and live after the heavenly fashion, they live by giving themselves away, — they must flow forth, or blossom, or radiate, — must enter as light and warmth into the harder natures beneath them. Getting is of the earth; giving is of the heavens.

We may desire both knowledge and love selfishly. Whatever we want for ourselves alone, we do not seek in the heavenly way. Friendship may be to us merely a cut flower, that graces our banquet for a day, and then dies a natural death, or it may be a live plant, daily unfolding its blossoms with sweetness and beauty that all may share. One of the blessed, unending needs of heaven must surely be the need of giving forth into other lives the blessedness which God has poured into ours.

It is only the most pitiable of heart poverty that feels as if it could do nothing to add to the happiness of other lives, and does not even care to make the attempt. And where no love is given, the life shriv-

els and narrows until none can be received. The soul itself is refreshed and enlarged by the stream of love that flows through it: — this is the true well of water springing up within unto everlasting life.

Opportunities come reaching out their hands to us every moment, — not to do great things, perhaps, but for the

> "little, daily, unremembered acts
> Of kindness and of love,"

that take off the chill from our undemonstrative, matter-of-fact intercourse with one another, and keep our hearts from starvation. Who does not know what it means to be "hungry for a little love?" Who has not often become aware that he was telling God of his heart-hunger, rather than of any physical need, while he repeated the words, "Give us this day our daily bread?" And even when we have been the recipients of such affection as falls naturally to almost all of us, has it not often only created in us a longing for

more satisfying food, as if we felt that at the human board we were but tasting

> "Mere crumbs of nourishment, while our strong hearts
> Are shaping ever an ideal love,
> And thirsting for a sympathy of soul
> Which angels only know?"

But the craving for affection is not always wholesome; it may be entirely and miserably morbid. It may be only a covetous outreach after a blessing which belongs to another, and without which that other life must be left wholly unsunned and unrefreshed. The heavenly love is an immortal flower: no deathly blight of selfishness can creep into its core. Of this, as of all the most precious things God has given to man, our hearts make no mistake in assuring us that "it is more blessed to give than to receive." To love is an eternal need of the soul: it is the free and spontaneous giving forth of our inmost and best. To be loved is not in our own power: it may come to us as the reaction of our own love back upon ourselves, or, more

blessedly, as the gracious and undeserved bestowal of Him from whom cometh down every good and perfect gift.

"Love of every kind is God's love." In knowing that it is such, human love becomes most sacred and solemn. It is God's heart that throbs in ours when it leaps up within us at the sound of a beloved name, at the pressure of a hand, a glance, a voice, a presence which is like music felt along all the chords of our being.

"As he hath loved us." In His own glorious way, through His own holy inspiration, we know what it is to love one another. Like His, our love, when it is true, is no self-seeking, but a perpetual giving. And the desire to bear a blessing to any soul must sooner or later bring us near that soul.

There is a passage in one of George MacDonald's books that beautifully emphasizes this thought: —

"I know now that it is by loving, and not by being loved, that one can come

nearest the soul of another: yea, that where two love, it is the love of each other, and not the being beloved by each other, that originates and perfects and assures their blessedness. I know that love gives, to him that loveth, power over any soul beloved, even if that soul know him not, bringing him inwardly close to that spirit; a power that cannot but be for good; for in proportion as selfishness intrudes, the love ceases, and the power that springs therefrom dies.

"Yet all love will one day meet with its return. All true love will, one day, behold its own image in the eyes of the beloved, and be humbly glad. This is possible in the realms of lofty Death."

And possible here also. For the breath of blessing that goes forth from our life is given back to us in fragrance from other lives. Love creates its own atmosphere, and is its own heaven. Who can guess how the air of earth is still sweetened, as with ever-blooming flowers, by the

loving thoughts that loving human beings have sent forth into it from the depths of their spirits since time began? Are not faithfulness and self-sacrifice well worth what they cost to us, if, by our heart's blood, we may but water the plants of heaven on earthly soil, for the refreshment of generations to come?

The friends who have been truly ours here, we must find in the hereafter, for they are part of ourselves: our life and theirs is one, and is "hid with Christ in God" where it is safe forever. But not even in heaven can we be sure of attracting to our side, whenever we will, those whose presence we most desire. We and they may be called apart on widely-separated embassies, each to our own special and peculiar ministries, there as here. And we shall learn to love each other better because of our capacity for separate service. When we do meet, it will be to find in each other, through our new experiences, an unexplored and undreamed-of

region of God's ever-widening heaven. He will always prepare us for and prepare for us our work, our place, and our companionships; and our deepest mutual yearning for soul-communion will go forth to Him forever on the wings of the prayer that is unceasingly heard in heaven — "Thy will be done!" Never can we be so glad in anything that concerns ourselves only, as in yielding our desires to His perfect will.

Slowly, falteringly, we are here learning how to say this prayer aright, — how to ask that God's will may be done, — not merely in a spirit of submission, but because His will is dearer to us than the dearest and deepest wish of our own hearts.

"A prayer in its simplest definition is merely a wish turned Godward," one has told us. The same earnest thinker says: "What Christ's prayer was, all true prayers must be. You must pray with the great prayer in sight. You must feel the

mountains above you while you work upon your little garden. Little by little your special wishes and the eternal will of God will grow into harmony with one another. All conflict will die away, and the great spiritual landscape from horizon to horizon will be but one. That is the prayer of eternity — the prayer of heaven — to which we may come, no one can say how near, on earth."

Yes; when we say "Thy will be done," we are praying on earth as they pray in heaven. Up towards the glory of infinite, ever-receding summits winds the path of the immortal traveler. Already, on these lower ascents, heaven is in bloom around us; for there is no true human joy that is not an outgrowth of the Holy Will. The peak hidden in clouds, and the cleft of the mountain-side that roots the timid flower, are formed of the same Eternal Rock.

"The hill of Zion yields
A thousand sacred sweets,
Before we reach the heavenly fields,
Or walk the golden streets."

And as we go on, we shall find every wish of our hearts blossoming into a prayer whose fragrance is the breath of the one adorable Will. Our little lives will feel their unity with the all-surrounding, all-pervading Life, in being at one with God.

It is not our wishes, but our needs, that God will eternally satisfy. Our desires are often so near the surface that they change with every passing current of thought; we do not ourselves know what we want; and we get only a little brief sparkle of pleasure from their gratification. But our needs take us down into the deepest depth of ourselves, — into those recesses of love and aspiration and resolve where character is shaped, — into the veiled sanctuary of our inmost personal being, where, whether we have ever caught a glimpse of His glory or not, we know that God abides. Our highest blessedness it is, that we have immortal needs, — needs which require eternity for their fulfillment. Eternally we shall need to be taken deeper

into the unfathomable heart of God, that we may learn to love as He loves. Eternally we shall need to pray the lofty prayer of Christ, "Thy will be done!" for eternally the mysteries of that Will which is indeed God Himself — His character — His personality — will rise as inaccessible mountain-tops above us, — yet as heights towards which we must ever ascend to breathe our native air.

Tennyson has sung of

"Tears from the depths of some divine despair;"

and there is a despair which is more heavenly than any attainment; a glimpse of white, unapproachable Holiness — of the Holy One himself — that humbles us to the dust while at the same time it lifts us up and draws us irresistibly onward. Thank God that we shall feel this holy despair forever! — that we shall never come to any level, however high, where we can rest in ourselves, and feel Him no longer above us, who is Himself our heaven! By the aspiration that climbs upward and

unfolds its flower toward Him more gloriously for the depth of humility in which it is rooted, we know our eternal need of Him. We know that we shall be seeking Him and finding Him forever and forever, growing into His infinity as it heightens and broadens and deepens beyond us.

Never can there come a time, in the farthest onward reach of the celestial journey, when a living soul will no longer hunger and thirst after righteousness, for to do so is to hunger and thirst after God. Angels and archangels must stoop beside us to fill their golden chalices, as we our cups of clay, at this inexhaustible Fountain. To hunger no more and to thirst no more is but to have our ever-returning need perpetually satisfied ; and from the overflow of our blessedness to become wells of the water of life to other souls.

Blessed be God, who has made earth and heaven one, in the heart's unquenchable thirst for Him !

VII.

All Things are Yours.

WHAT can an angel regard as riches? Certainly nothing that is appreciable by our mortal senses, — not such things as we see with covetous eyes, and touch with miserly hands, and lock away from thieves in tomb-like coffers.

Milton has drawn for us a fancy-sketch of one such sordid angel, among the rebellious host: —

"Mammon, the least erected spirit that fell
From heaven, for even in heaven his looks and thoughts
Were always downward bent, admiring more
The riches of heaven's pavement, trodden gold,
Than aught divine or holy else enjoyed
In vision beatific."

But the messengers of God, who fly abroad on His errands through the universe, cannot travel with their winged thoughts weighted by any material burden. An

angel's riches are the messages he bears, — messages of love and truth from the heart of God to His creatures. The messenger knows that he is the bearer of inestimable wealth, but he has no desire regarding it except that it may reach its destination, and bless the souls for whom it was intended. If any selfish hoarding of truth and love were possible, the truth would turn to falsehood, and the love to hate — and heaven would be hell. The heavenly riches must be given away, freely as the air we breathe, or it is no longer heavenly.

Again the plural gives the pronoun its value. "All things are *yours*." We are not the real possessors of things earthly or heavenly, while we persist in saying "They are mine;" the only permanent claim we have upon them is that they are *ours*. God never gives us anything for our individual self alone. The divineness of His gifts is proved by our desire to share them with others. It is only perishable objects that we can hold selfishly, and in so holding them, they and we perish together.

The Apostle does not leave anything out; — the friends who have come nearest to our spiritual life, — the things that live, and the things that die, — the things we have now, and the things that are coming to us here or hereafter, — all are ours, to be held as God's gift through Christ, not by any exclusive claim, but for the benefit and blessing of others. Nothing is ours for hoarding or for display; all things are ours to share.

But what, to Saint Paul, was the meaning of "things?" Not that in them which can be touched and handled; that only in them which is spiritual, or which symbolizes the spiritual, made them realities to him. A soul cannot possess anything material: its grasp is too large: the material slips away from it, and leaves only the indestructible essence. The soul of man can possess only the soul of things. That is why the rich man is often so poor, he only owns the outside husks of things; not the sweetness and richness of their life.

The rich and the poor alike need to change their estimate of values. If the poor man wants the rich man's nothings, he would be no better off for having them than the mistaken rich man who thinks they are something. The envious poor and the purse-proud rich are in a state of equal poverty. Every accumulation of things, merely as things, shuts out the light of heaven from the soul. If the rich man's possessions are not, to himself and to others, a medium of spiritual knowledge and love, he had better scatter them abroad, like the dust they are, to mingle with their kindred dust. If the poor man, the emptiness of whose earthly condition God has made especially favorable for the inflow of the riches of faith, would be willing to exchange his faith for money or houses or lands, let him put on sackcloth and ashes, and pray that his eyes may be opened to see what are the true riches!

Should the dreams ever come to pass, that to-day are floating in the air around us, of a time when earthly conditions shall be

equalized, and all shall share evenly in earthly comforts, luxuries, and opportunities, men will perhaps find themselves in an earthly Paradise, but it will not be the kingdom of heaven. That can come only in the souls of men, in loving hearts and righteous lives. The dwellers in that kingdom know nothing of riches or poverty, except as they are revealed by character. They are regarded as richest who have most life to impart to others. There are no *poor souls* in heaven.

Christ pitied rich men because it is so hard for them to find their way over their heaped-up wealth into the kingdom of God. And yet we see around us many who have been baptized into His name eager to become rich, making it the absorbing purpose of their lives. What is the meaning of their baptism to them? Do they remember that their Master, the Son of Man, had not where to lay His head? Has He changed His opinion regarding riches, to suit the changes of these latter days? The

poor rich man who went away sorrowful from Christ may have seen how worthless his great possessions were in comparison with the Divine friendship he craved, and may have returned with joy, scattering his gold among the suffering poor as he came. So only could he have shown that he was sufficiently in sympathy with the lofty nature he had approached, to become his disciple. Yet so would he have found that in having nothing, he possessed all things. For things are only valuable to us as the instruments of spiritual truth in shaping our lives. When they have done all such service as they can for us, God has some finer instrument ready for the finer work that is required. Sometimes the coarse instruments are wealth and luxury, and the fine ones poverty and discomfort.

We must count even our circumstances, whether they seem favorable or the opposite, among "all things" out of which we win our everlasting inheritance. The Hand that is at work upon us knows just what

discipline our nature needs to mould it anew into the image of Christ, and we can welcome His touch, though it brings disappointment, sorrow, sickness, or death. Therefore,

"O ye that faint and die, arise and live!
Sing, ye whom all things have a charge to bless
If He is faithful who hath sworn to give,
Then be ye also faithful, and possess!—

"Count all the pains that speed thee to thy rest
Among the riches of thy purchased right:
Yea, bind them in His name upon thy breast
As jewels for the Bride, the Lamb's delight."

"And ye are Christ's." Things that we hold as our best treasures, we value most for the giver's sake: and to this gift of all things is added the name of Him who has given us all. By freeing us from the blindness and the fetters of sin, by saving our souls, He has saved also the soul of all things for us. The marks of His sacrifice are upon all that is lasting in our earthly possessions, upon all that is grand or lovely in nature, and upon our dearest social at-

tachments and home affections. He has redeemed them from the moth and rust and decay of mortality, and has given them back to us as heavenly treasures. We hold the whole as He holds it, in the name of His Father, God.

It is a holy world. There is nothing in it that is not signed with the sign of His cross, that is not baptized into the eternal purity of His consecration.

We are commanded not to love the world nor the things that are in the world; nor must we love them, as things, as material and perishable. The worldling cares for things only in their external value; the ascetic cannot see that they have any other value. One would accumulate and hoard them, while the other would sweep them all away; ascetic and worldling both making the same mistake; both regarding even human love and home affections — God's most sacred gifts — as of the earth, and to be possessed or despised at will. But it is not earth, it is earthliness, that we are to

put away from our hearts. He has made nothing through which His love cannot be breathed upon us, through which our gratitude cannot be breathed back to Him.

> "Who hates, hates Thee; who loves, becomes
> Therein to Thee allied;
> All sweet accords of hearts and homes
> In Thee are multiplied."

The heart that appreciates most deeply the beauty and the richness of created things, most earnestly prays,

> "In all things nothing may I see,
> Nothing desire or seek, but Thee!"

"What," inquires one, "is Christianity itself but living to the whole instead of living to the part? It gives the heart Christ instead of self for its spring and centre. In the meanest things of every day, no man liveth, no man dieth to himself, so inwrapt and interfolded are human destinies in the continual action and reaction that goes on through life. The Christian is one who belongs consciously to a kingdom in which there is nothing unrelated."

Character is the possession that seems most exclusively personal, as it is that which distinguished us from others of the race. But even in that, we are not our own. By just that distinctiveness, we belong to the rest. By just that difference in us, we contribute something that was lacking to the whole. And how much others have given, to make us what we are! If there is anything good or true or beautiful in us, the saints and the poets and sages have entered our lives, and have helped to develop those qualities.

We say that our friends are everything to us, and it is no exaggeration, if we have known what real friendship is. They are always more than themselves to us. They are what their alliances with grander natures than ours have made them. We are richer for all the goodness they have loved, and for all the greatness they have aspired to share. Our friends are always unconsciously giving us other friendships, in giving us themselves.

In heaven, life is all that there is to enjoy or to give. Love there is the natural, unrepressed interflow of life between soul and soul. The longing to bless and the need to be blessed meet each other on the way like expectant pilgrims, and giving and receiving are an equal joy. Character recognizes what is nobler than itself, and bows itself instinctively before the superior nature for a blessing; or, where a beseeching glance is met, its own hand is ready to bestow benediction. There is no withholding or refusing of gifts, for only what belongs to another is offered him. It is the business of the angels to find for their heavenly bestowals the rightful place. Love and Duty sing together one song, and all discords subside into the eternal harmonies. This we know is true of heaven, because it is true of the heavenly life as we have seen it here. We have known angelic natures on earth, and have received from their hands treasures which cannot be stolen or destroyed.

All things *are* ours. We need not wait for heaven until we die. If our hearts would but open to receive it, the kingdom of God would be within us now. We are heirs together with Christ. Have we not sometimes caught a glimpse of our immortal inheritance? —

> "O awful joy! O life divine!
> O bliss too great, too full!
> Earth, man, heaven, angels, all are thine,
> And thou art God's, my soul!"

VIII.

The Threefold Cord.

NO TWO imperfect beings can form a perfect friendship. But let them be united in the love of another, a perfect being, — there is but One such, — and their friendship is firm as eternity. This is the threefold cord which is not easily broken. Two lives which depend only upon each other will always be loosening their hold and slipping apart: they must feel themselves interwound with a stronger, invisible Life before they can be really sure of each other, — with an indestructible uniting substance which penetrates their mutual affection, and makes it enduring. That Substance, that Being, is God.

All love is of God. Every true friend is a glimpse of God. The affection that

leaves Him out loses its divinest sweetness. No friend is truly known or loved until loved and known in God.

Adhesion is not union. To claim a friend is not therefore to be a friend. Friendship between two persons, or rather the bond that they call friendship, is often only a doubled selfishness. They wish to shut themselves into their own little Paradise, and to shut the rest of the world out of it; and a very small and stifling Paradise it is soon felt to be, by one or the other, or by both.

Like other exiles from Eden, human friendship finds its healthiest life in facing the fierce winds of the desert, and in winning from a rough and thorny earth the food which it gladly shares with all fellow-wanderers. Nothing draws us so close to each other as the things we struggle after together, the knowledge that is to be won from this reticent universe, the great interests of humanity in which we forget our own petty wants and cares,

and the ever approaching and receding mysteries of the heavens. There is no sweeter heart-growth than friendship; but we must not expect that this loveliest blossom born under earthly skies will flourish without freedom and fresh air.

It is that which underlies our relationships which makes them real and strong.

"How were friendship possible?" asks Carlyle. "In mutual devotedness to the Good and True: otherwise impossible, except as armed neutrality or hollow commercial league." Elsewhere he expresses the same sentiment with a finer shading:—

"Only in looking heavenward, take it in what sense you may, not in looking earthward, does what we call union, mutual love, society, begin to be possible."

The reality of an affection is best tested by its power of going beyond a single object, and giving itself to the whole.

> "The love for one from which there doth not spring
> Wide love for all, is but a worthless thing."

The threefold cord has not shown its full

strength until it has wound itself around the great lonely heart of humanity, binding it to each separate heart, and drawing all together upward and homeward: —

> "For so the whole round earth is every way
> Bound with gold chains about the feet of God"

"The love that enlarges not its borders, that is not ever spreading and including and deepening, will contract, shrivel, decay, die. . . . That we are the sons and daughters of God, born from His heart, the outcoming offspring of His love, is a bond closer than all other bonds in one."

"In God alone can man meet man."

Whoever truly loves one of God's children must feel his heart going out in God-like tenderness towards all the rest. In all souls he recognizes the kindred of the one soul that has been to him the fullest expression of humanity and of God. He who really loves has tasted of immortality.

It is our human privilege to know, even as Christ knew it, that we live enveloped with eternity; that it enters every part

of our nature, through root and bough and remotest leaf-bud, making our whole life eternal life. Thus He spoke of Himself as "the Son of Man which is in heaven," and thus, truly sharing His life, we may and ought to feel about ourselves.

We are here to develop, through our visible relationships, the invisible Life within them and beyond them, and so make them and ourselves true unfoldings of the kingdom of heaven. What a deep, calm, holy unity would enter these apparently fragmentary and entangled lives of ours, if our souls were penetrated with the consciousness of what is true regarding them, that they are already lived beforehand for us, in the heart and mind of God; that we have only to follow His leadings, and not our own inclinations, to be in perfect peace! Heaven, as we may know it here, is the harmony of our thoughts with the revelation of God's thoughts regarding us.

"Our thoughts are heard in heaven."

And our feelings are felt in heaven; our

impulses, our desires, our deeds, make harmony, or cause a silence, among the angel-choruses. For what we humanly think, and feel, and are, is indeed but our response to our own deeper being, to the Life in which we are embosomed, and of which, as an eternal, divine conception, we are an inseparable part. Our own sin can tear us asunder from that Life, but nothing else can.

Everything was planned for us before our entrance into humanity, the expected children of God. Our human relationships were already heavenly relationships, before we knew anything about them. No family or national tie, no sacred social bond, no real friendship is of our own seeking and planning; it was all prepared for us in the beginning by the Father to whom we belong, who knows our needs of body and soul and mind. But it is left to us to discern the beauty of these relations, as they are unfolded to us, to take every joy that one life can impart to another life as

the touch of His hand, and the embrace of His love; otherwise we lose their strength and sweetness, and weave about our daily path a network of mistake and bewilderment.

We all belong to each other, but friendship is the especial accord of one life with a kindred life. It is harmony felt at the foundations of conscious being, not obliterating personal differences, but so pervading both natures as to help each to a happier and truer expression of itself. It is because they are what they are, in the heavenly life out of which this earthly existence unfolds, that they are friends. It is not that they seek each the other, but that God sends each to the other, because they belong together. Should they never meet on earth, should they even be unaware of one another's existence here, somewhere in God's eternity they must be drawn together, because they are one in Him.

We tremble at the threshold of any new friendship, with awe and wonder and fear

lest it should not be thus real ; or, believing that it is, lest we should prove ourselves unworthy of this solemn and holy contact of life with life, of soul with soul. We cannot live unworthy lives in the constant presence of noble beings to whom we belong, who believe that we are at least endeavoring after nobleness. This is our truest loyalty to our friends : loyalty to the God who has been revealed to us through them. The heaven by which we are surrounded never draws so near to us, never opens upon us so clearly, as through the eye and the voice, through the heart and the being of a friend. Who can question the personal being of God, when the most heavenly-minded persons we know are only great and beautiful to us because they always suggest the Presence of Some One greater and purer and more beautiful than themselves, — some diviner Person who is their inspiration, — to whom their whole being bows in allegiance ?

We hold only sacred relations to one

another. To be unfaithful and unloving is to be profane. For God inhabits the sanctuary of our affections. It is His love, beating in our hearts, that is felt by those whom we touch with the lightest fingertips of mercy or of tenderness. Whatever of purity or of truth we can impart to others, is wholly of His inspiration.

We say that there are no separations in heaven; neither are there in the heavenly places of earth. Time and space have nothing to do with the soul. "He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit" with Him, and He cannot be separated from Himself. The prayer of Christ to His Father for His friends was "that they may be one, even as We are one." The children are no more apart from each other than from their Father, if they are lovingly doing His will, though they may seem to be sundered by the width of continents and the silence of the grave itself.

The loftiest test of friendship — under-

stood as companionship — is the power to do without it. And in this world of external confusions and separations, there is often such a need. We do not yield the friendship, but we must again and again forego the companionship. Then comes the proof of our capacity for sacrifice, our loyalty to the Highest of all. We turn our faces from each other, but never our hearts, and walk our opposite ways. Gradually the heavens widen and deepen above us ; we find ourselves breathing new, yet strangely familiar atmospheres, sweet with the breath of the old affection ; we see ourselves — each sees the other — met once more in a Presence which has never forsaken us, — the presence of one who puts His cross into the hands of all holiest friendship, saying, "Conquer by this!"

There is no danger of losing love, here or hereafter, if it is only real ; for love is the one indestructible element in the universe.

Jesus, when He was about to leave his

disciples, shared with them the sorrow with which they received the announcement of it, knowing that they could not understand it as He did. In words tremulous with tenderness He tried to tell them that He was not indeed going away from them, — that He was really coming nearer to them in the Spirit. He showed them that they had not in their closest daily intercourse known Him truly, except as they had drawn spiritually near to Him and to his Father. Even in their "Lo! now speakest thou plainly," He saw that there was no clear insight, — that they could only learn the truth of his eternal presence with them through the experience of apparently losing Him. And so all that even He could do was to turn to His Father and pray for them, — and then lay down His life for them and for the world.

"As I have loved you, that ye also love one another." And how did He love these friends of His? Not with that partial affection that refuses to see faults and errors,

but with the devotion that loves in spite of them, and that wins the mistaken soul to truth by imparting its own wisdom and fervor and faithfulness. His love for every one of those separate souls was enriched by His divine grasp of all souls besides. He saw His Father's whole family in each of these His children ; and so to us also His parting charge was given, "Love each other as I have loved you."

The tenderness that we feel for those to whom we are bound by natural ties is only typical of the deeper union which exists between those who are kindred in soul, who are joined to each other through sympathy with God's thoughts for us all, and in working with Him to restore His scattered family to their Father's hearthstone. It was the most profound love for Mary, and for the family of Joseph into which He had been born, that made Jesus say, —

"Whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother."

He cared for His family as he cared for the thronging souls who were eagerly listening to His words, in their spiritual relationship to Him. He could not have loved them so much, if He had not loved His Father more.

There is no inspiration like that we receive from a great heart, all-embracing and self-forgetful, in echoing whose deep throbbings our own forget every want, even to the craving for a recognition and response from that very heart. The best proof of our love for a large, unselfish nature is that we are growing larger and more unselfish ourselves. In friendship we often feel that it is more blessed to receive than to give, to take the richness of the higher nature which we revere into our own, conscious that we have nothing in ourselves to give back, except our gratitude and loving appreciation. It is in this way that we obtain our best spiritual education ; —

"And what delights can equal those
That stir the spirit's inner deeps,
When one that loves, but knows not, reaps
A truth from one that loves and knows?"

It is like the sunshine and the rainfall upon the thirsty flowers, developing the common life of all, and the separate life of each.

That large expression of the Apostle's, "The love of God is *shed abroad* in your hearts through the Holy Ghost," may be applied to a pure and strong human friendship, that flows into our souls, as all truest love does, to flow forth again in blessing upon other souls. To try to hoard love, to shut the affluent stream in upon our narrow boundaries, is only to bring stagnation into our being, and to force the rich current away through other channels, where it may quench the thirst of a more grateful soil.

"As I have loved you." With a love that blossoms with holy sweetness on earth because its roots are fed by the

power of an endless life: with a love that is to expand forever in the light of God's smile, taking into itself, as it grows, the life of all His worlds, and filling the universe with its ineffable fragrance. The sorrowing poet may well say, looking onward into the heavens after a beloved one who has gone before, that he feels

> "Less yearning for the friendship fled,
> Than some strong bond which is to be."

We must wait patiently for many blessings that we now most deeply desire: but we may every day strengthen our friendships by a more thoughtful human faithfulness and a diviner consecration, —

> "Until we close with all we love,
> And all we flow from, soul in soul."

"In whatever relates to the higher human affections, every true heart discerns that their spirit infinitely transcends the life we give them; and Faith argues that God, who leaves nothing unfulfilled, means to bring out of them all the beauty which their own nature contains." "Our spir-

itual life is all prophetic, and what is yet unfulfilled is the kingdom of heaven within us. Men of deep hearts know this in the failures of expression. Their words and tones have unfathomable meanings."

We know but little of what we really are to one another. "Man cannot utter it." There are no words in any human vocabulary to express what friend may be to friend, even in this earthly life. It is best revealed through the warm, palpitating, fathomless silence of love — the love of God, in which, as if we were but one heart, we are all together enfolded.

IX.

Bridegroom and Bride.

S it true, that the relation between human beings which we regard as the perfect ideal relation, is not to be continued beyond this life? It is the Sadducee in us that asks — the skeptic who cannot comprehend the spirituality of human ties — who considers the external and visible bond as the only real one. That which binds earth to earth must end with the earth: that which unites spirit to spirit is of the Spirit; the interflow of Love which is in its nature eternal. This love, in which all human life is one with God, which joins us to Him and to one another as spiritual beings, in companionships and groups and close friendships, may blend one spirit with another spirit more intimately still; so closely that it

will seem as if there were but one conscious life-throb in the twain thus united. So may angel be wedded to angel in the resurrection. Such marriages are not unimaginable, but most probable and natural. All things else around us, all circumstances and conditions, are symbolic of something similar to themselves which yet is higher than themselves; all seem waiting to unfold their holier hidden meaning. This strongest human tie of all must point to something like itself, beyond itself; more glorious and more permanent.

We may picture to ourselves the beauty of a celestial union like this, as if two separate rills of love, flowing from hidden sources in the heart of God, found themselves approaching each other, sparkling in the light of His smile, and blending themselves in one shining, musical current, to swell the "pure river of the water of life, clear as crystal," which nourishes all sweet and wholesome and immortal growths. Blessed are the pure in heart! for through their

lives may glide in beauty, even on earth, that river of holiness, "proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb." It is the joy of all true love, none the less a joy for its unconsciousness, that it is a flowing stream; that it imparts its vitalizing refreshment to the thirsty, outreaching fibres of other lives.

There is no sadder possibility on earth than that two human hearts should pass a life-time together, holding love and marriage only in their mortal, selfish significance. If marriage shuts two beings in exclusively upon each other, it is because they are too small to receive the great gift which their union might have been to them. Sunbeam marries sunbeam that there may be more splendor and warmth in the world. Soul rushing to blend with soul, each luminous with love, must radiate the light and the joy which each has received from the other. In moments when the heart is filled to overflowing for the one best beloved, there is an almost infinite enlarge-

ment of the whole conscious being, a feeling as of warm oceanic currents going forth to touch the shores of other lonelier lives, a divine necessity for sharing with other souls a blessedness too great for one life to contain. And such love often proves itself capable of the loftiest sacrifices.

Perhaps one of the best interpretations of our Lord's words concerning marrying and giving in marriage is that of Browning, through the lips of his dying Pompilia: —

"Marriage on earth seems such a counterfeit,
Mere imitation of the inimitable:
In heaven we have the real and true and sure.
'T is there they neither marry nor are given
In marriage, but are as the angels: right,
Oh, how right that is, how like Jesus Christ
To say that! Marriage-making for the earth,
With gold so much, — birth, power, repute so much, —
Or beauty, youth, so much, in lack of these! —

"Be as the angels rather! who, apart,
Know themselves into one, are found at length
Married, but marry never, no, nor give
In marriage: they are man and wife at once,
When the true time is."

In the "Light of Asia," Siddartha says to Yasõdhara, foreseeing that he must go away from her for the world's sake: —

"Yet kiss me on the mouth, and drink these words
From heart to heart therewith, that thou mayest know
What others will not, that I loved thee most
Because I loved so well all living souls."

The highest natures can be satisfied with nothing less than this self-forgetting, spiritual relation. And the truest-hearted will live soberly together in their wealth of human happiness, —

"Foreseeing that fair love which doth not feed
On fleeting sense, that life which knows no age,
That blessed last of deaths when Death is dead," —

no empty Nirvana, but conscious, eternal oneness with the loving life of the living God.

It is sacrilege to hold love or marriage as mere earthly relations, and as having nothing to do with our relations to God.

"That man knows little either of love or of religion who imagines they ought to be kept apart. Of what sort is either, if unfit

to approach the other? Has God decreed, created a love that must separate from Himself? Shall not love to the heart created lift up the heart to the Heart creating? Alas for the love that is not treasured in heaven! for the moth and the rust will devour it. Ah, these pitiful old moth-eaten loves!"

And alas for a love-literature too well known among us, light and flimsy indeed, when not coarsely false in its treatment of the most sacred relations! How can it help in developing human character, or in shaping communities into stable foundations for the kingdom of heaven?

The Sadducee believes only in this world, and so can comprehend nothing beyond its mortal relationships. He knows nothing of the eternal sanctities of being. The bridal truth has its roots down deep in the unexplored abysses of God. In the perfect time foretold by prophecy, the land itself is said to be married. And to Zion it is declared: "Thy Maker is thy husband."

When the Apostle seeks for a suggestion of the mystical union between Christ and the Church, marriage is the holiest symbol he can find. The City of God on earth, the New Jerusalem, is compared to "a bride adorned for her husband." Perhaps it would not be far from the truth to say that heaven itself is marriage. It is one vast union of souls with God. The new heaven and the new earth will at last meet and know themselves one; that will be the bridal day of eternity.

It is unutterably sad to see how this loveliest thought of God for His children is everywhere cheapened and defiled. No one can believe in a holy God who does not believe in the holiness of faithful human love. Yet not all who comprehend best the marriage-mystery have accepted the earthly bond. They are too well aware of its inadequacy, of the rareness of the real experience. But in their hearts is ever unfolding the beauty of an immortal Beulah. They do not withdraw themselves from

other lives; their family-ties are universal, and closer and more gracious and tender for their own especial denials. Through every inmost seclusion of their being is heard the voice of the Heavenly Bridegroom, the answer of His consecrated Bride. Such souls live for the regeneration of earth, and beauty and truth and righteousness spring up around them in living forms. Childhood and youth gather to them for inspiration; and older and wiser ones feel their life renewed through them, as from fountains unfailingly fresh.

The true fathers and mothers of the race are not always those through whom mortal birth is received. "More are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith the Lord." The dreariest orphanhood is not always among earth's poor. It is often found in the houses of the rich, where parents suffocate their own souls and the souls of their children with pleasures and luxuries; where the little ones find nothing to remind them of their Father

in heaven. Whether it is spiritual or physical starvation that claims our aid, God has made it the privilege of every man and woman to share in His loving parentage. We may all take to our hearts and comfort and nourish and educate His neglected children.

"To be," it has been said, "is to be in relations." There is no such thing, spiritually, as living apart and alone. To separate ourselves wholly from human beings is to separate ourselves from God, and that is death. Self disintegrates: love unites. Our family and social ties — brotherhood, sisterhood, neighborhood, citizenship — take us back to one organic centre in marriage, the mystical bond wherein God unites humanity, through all its tribes and races, to Himself. Whoever holds a low ideal of marriage does not believe in the sanctity of his own being. In it our human lives are rooted, and apart from it we have no conscious existence. All that is best in us, from our earliest breath, blos-

soms and ripens out of its inner sacred sweetness, and what part it may have in shaping our future heavenly relations, we wait to learn. We are each human because we each belong to the Whole; and the whole of humanity, as if it were one being, is at last to be spiritually united to God, purified, perfected, without blemish or spot.

"It is a great mystery," this interblending of life with Life, of humanity with God. We could not comprehend it at all, except through His coming close to us in One who is the perfect revelation of Himself, "the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His Person." Entering into His love, the love of Christ our Lord, we are drawn towards each other in holy union and communion, and we begin to learn the deep meaning of His words — "That they may be one, even as We are one."

Christ and His Church are one Life. The Bride, the Church, is humanity regenerate, redeemed, as she will be when she

has clothed herself in the white robes of her Lord's righteousness. But now she sees very dimly the grandeur of her destiny, the glory of unutterable Love and Life and Light that awaits her. The Bridegroom, in awakening her to her spiritual possibilities, draws her ever nearer to Himself. He is patient with her indifference and her waywardness, for He is sure of bringing her home to His Father's house at last.

Listen! Already, through the dreary noises of the world's wilderness, she hears His voice, and answers! The Bride is making herself ready.

"Blessed are they who are called to the marriage-supper of the Lamb."

X.

Forever Young.

WHO would not be young forever? It is a proof of our immortality that we dread growing old. Old age and death are of this world only: there is nothing of heaven in them. But they only mean the wearing out of our earthly garments; the heavenly life within knows neither destruction nor decay. Youth is in itself an ecstasy; the joy of conscious life, strength, and growth. But in the physical experience we have only a hint of what it really is. There would be small satisfaction in living on indefinitely, an unthinking, rosy, well-fed animal. Plotinus was not far astray in thanking the gods that his soul was not tied to an immortal body. A spirit may well rejoice to wear out and lay aside the clothes he has outgrown,

whatever childish delight he may once have taken in them.

For what is the greatest happiness of youth? The full possession and free use of all our powers in elasticity and overflow. But not this alone. Youth would be a poor and tame experience without its "long, long thoughts." It is richer in the future than it is in the present. The landscape around it is gladdest in the visionary beckoning of "a fair, long Paradise beyond the mountains." Its deepest joy is in its seemingly illimitable possibilities. And this is the very essence of its spiritual meaning. We are old, we are ready to die, — nay, we are already dead, — when we see nothing before us worth striving after. It is the forward look of the soul that keeps her forever young.

Youth is not merely a lovely phase of the transient years; it is a pervading quality of character; a light in itself, and an inspiration to all surrounding lives. It is a perennial freshness at the roots of being;

and its glow of contagious life shines out often most radiantly beneath gray hairs and a wrinkled forehead. The tree that has ripened its fruit through many seasons bursts into a spring-blossoming just as fresh and fragrant as that which unfolds from the half-grown sapling at its side. There are infinite beginnings bourgeoning out continually from what seems to us the end. While we live in the inspiration of these, wherever and whatever else we may be, we are young. How can mortal age or youth disturb the thoughts of an inhabitant of the kingdom of heaven, in the presence of Him who is at once the Child that is born to us, and the Ancient of Days; the Root and the Offspring; the Beginning and the End; the Morning-Star of every soul?

This lovely heart-freshness that we call youth is the natural flowering-forth of spiritual being. It is born of the beauty of holiness, and sparkles forever with the morning-dew of immortality. Under sin-

less skies, clearer vistas will open upon the released soul, as it starts with renewed vigor upon its unending pilgrimage. Its joy will spring up like a flower to drink in the wonder of unknown, uplifted horizons, the grandeur of a forever-opening Beyond. It will grow younger for the very boundlessness of its outlook.

Infinite hope is eternal youth. On the loftiest heights we shall behold summits sublimely beckoning us higher still, and our feet will ascend them, shod with angelic strength. Entering into the most dazzling glory that allures us onward, we shall see dawning through it "a finer light in light," and our sight will be deepened to bear the intensity of the unutterable vision. And through the tenderest warmth of celestial love that enfolds us will ever throb a pulse of dearer and more spiritual tenderness that will win our hearts to meet and blend with it in a purer beating and a holier aspiring, forever and forever.

One chief delight of youth on earth is

growth ; to learn the meaning of ourselves, and to live out God's purpose in us. Jesus Christ himself, we may say with reverence, came to a knowledge of his own divine secret by just such means as those by which we come to understand life and ourselves, by living and learning and growing. He would not truly have assumed our nature, if he had not taken it as it is, with its ignorances and its limitations. There is every evidence that from childhood he was wondering at himself and testing himself. He knew that his Father's life was within his own in some mysterious way, full of gloriously unfolding import for mankind. But who he himself was he learned gradually, as any infant learns that it is a human being, as any boy grows into a realization of his manhood.

When his mother reproached him for staying behind at Jerusalem, to listen to the rabbis in the temple, and to ask them questions, — his mother, whose love must often have overflowed towards her wonder-

ful son, with the things she had pondered of him in her heart, — his answer was a gentle remonstrance : " Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business ? " as if he would say : " Why, those wise men were talking of my Father. I thought *you* would understand that I must linger where anything was to be learned about Him, and about what He wishes me to do." So he grew, increasing in wisdom and stature, until he came to the full consciousness of his own divine life, and to the complete expression of the divine power through his human faculties. To his perfect development none of us approaches, except at an immeasurable distance behind ; that we do not and cannot, implies an eternity in prospect.

Jesus Christ went away from this mortal life a young man, but he had borne the flower and the fruit of his human being at once. Men spoke of him as if they thought he might have been almost fifty years old. The burden he carried might well have

made him seem prematurely aged. Physically, he was weary and worn. But on the Mount of Transfiguration, his disciples saw Him as He really was, radiant from within with unchangeable, immortal youth.

So, when we think of the friends who have gone from us into the unseen, having passed through many changes in their physical lineaments from youth to old age, — we do not see these changes ; our vision is of *themselves*, in the fresh, full, unhindered expression of all that was best and most real in them. The soul is always young, and the heavenly form is the true revelation of the soul. Even here, we know our friends far less by their physical peculiarities than by this subtle, unconscious revelation of themselves that we call "expression." As the life deepens and is purified, it becomes transparent to loving eyes, and its early freshness and its later ever-increasing richness, its simplicity and its wisdom are one, in the character of the person we hold dear. This is, and is to be, the youth of immortality.

What are the things we most dread to lose with youth? Enthusiasm, eagerness to learn what truth is, and to try our strength upon unfolding tasks; the free, unhindered use of ourselves. The first of these we need not forego; the noblest of our race have felt their inward stir to great endeavor until the day of their death: and if we have enlarged and strengthened our spiritual powers as the physical have weakened, there is no real loss of the last, but an eternal gain. We cannot tell how much we may yet have to do for this dear old confused and confusing world where we have had our schooling, after we get outside of it — which may indeed be getting within it — getting at the heart of its perplexing mysteries. Certainly the vigor of an ever-fresh immortality will not let itself be wasted in idleness.

We live by our aspirations, our hopes and affections here; they are the central impulses of our being, and they must throb on in us forever; —

"All before us lies the way;
Give the past unto the wind!
All before us is the day;
Night and darkness are behind.

"Eden, with its angels bold,
Love and flowers and coolest sea,
Is less an ancient story told
Than a growing prophecy."

But we must hold to whatever was true in the story of the past, if we would understand its prophecy. Our Past, our Present, and our Future, are one uninterrupted, although ever unfinished history.

There is not one real thing that passes away with the years. Childhood goes, but the child-heart lives on and reappears with its own angelic lineaments beneath new heavens. The bloom of youth fades, and its strength decays, but the beautiful soul has been growing young and strong out of the very death of that portion of its existence which was unenduring, as the life of the tree is fed by its own fallen leaves. We cannot climb the hills in age as we did

in youth, but if we have given our wings freedom to grow, we can mount up as eagles to the sky, and look down upon the proud summits of earth as molehills beneath us. We laugh at the destructions of time, when we live above the years.

"'T is always morning somewhere." The sunset is but a traveling sunrise. The soul is swifter than the sun. Old age is a sunset and a sunrise in one. If we follow with unflagging feet the highest illumination of our lives, we shall have within us and radiate around us the glory of a perpetual dawn. The fountain of perennial youth springs up in the heart and overflows through the whole being of those who have found in Christ the secret of eternal life.

Though we are to lay aside — though we are already beginning to lay aside — all of the body that can decay, we are to live on as spirit-forms, or we shall not be ourselves. The Resurrection must mean the perfect unfolding of whatever shape God's

Spirit within us was breathing us into here, as separate identities. The consciousness of our own personality, and the recognition of our fellow-beings as persons, are among the foundation-stones of our thought of immortality. Our whole nature cries out against any other suggestion; —

> "No! I have *friends* in Spirit-Land, —
> Not shadows in a shadowy band,
> Not others, but themselves are they!"

We shall look into the same deep eyes, and clasp the same warm hands, and walk on beside the same beloved beings we have known here, our transfigured bodies forever "young with the youth of the angels."

To repeat some strong words from Dora Greenwell's "Two Friends:"

"How much has the human heart gained in the one revelation which enables it to say, 'I believe in the resurrection of the body;' that gives the flesh also leave to 'rest in hope!'

"It is this belief which brings with it all that is actual and personal into our future

life; that gives us back our friends, looking and talking as they did here; gives us back our feelings and occupations; in fact, our lives. . . . When I think of death, it is never as setting the soul free from the body, but rather as admitting it into a state where these two, in the marriage of the purified soul with the glorified body, will learn the true blessedness of their union, all being removed that has sometimes made it irksome and constraining. . . . Man's heart and his flesh cry out for the living God: they claim the resurrection: they ask to see life — the whole of life — bloom; as a flower, according to the fancy of the old alchemists, might be revived from its ashes."

The instinctive prescience of the human heart regarding a personal resurrection is also thus eloquently expressed in a passage from George MacDonald's "Unspoken Sermons."

"Ah, my friends! What will resurrection or life be to me, how shall I continue

to love God as I have learned to love Him through you, if I find He cares so little for this human heart of mine as to take from me the gracious visitings of your faces and forms? . . . No, our God is an unveiling, a revealing God. He will raise you from the dead, that I may behold you; that that which vanished from the earth may again stand forth, looking out of the same eyes of eternal love and truth, holding out the same mighty hand of brotherhood, the same delicate and gentle, yet strong hand, of sisterhood to me, this me that knew you and loved you in the days gone by. . . . I shall not care that the matter of the forms I loved a thousand years ago has returned to mingle with the sacred goings on of God's science, upon that far-off world wheeling its nursery of growing loves and wisdoms through space; I shall not care, so long as it is you yourselves that are before me, beloved! so long as through these forms I know that I look on my own, on my loving souls of the

ancient time ; so long as my souls have got garments of revealing after their own old lovely fashion, garments to reveal themselves to me. The new shall then be dear as the old, and for the same reason, that it reveals the old love.

"Lord, evermore give us this Resurrection, like thine own in the body of Thy Transfiguration ! Let us hear, and see, and know, and be seen, and heard, and known, as Thou seest, hearest, and knowest ! Give us glorified bodies through which to reveal the glorified thoughts which shalt then inhabit us, when not only shalt Thou reveal God, but each of us shall reveal Thee ! "

XI.

An Endless Life.

OUR human vocabularies are pitifully inadequate to the utterance of any heavenly meaning. We have learned from them to think of eternity as time going on and on in a continuous groove, like a railway line, far indeed into mysterious distances, our one idea of it being its endlessness. But life is not merely a lengthening, invisible thread; it is a power, issuing from and going forth into the Infinite.

To live is to have a place and a share in the boundlessness of God's creation. He could not make us in His image without making us immortal. "Indissoluble" is the adjective given in one translation of the clause "the power of an endless life;" and immortality is life indissoluble from God's.

We, becoming kings and priests unto God by entering into the spirit of Christ, are partners in His power and inhabitants of His eternity. We can say to the Love that at once shelters and liberates us: —

> "Thus doth Thy hospitable greatness lie
> Around us like a boundless sea:
> We cannot lose ourselves where all is home,
> Nor drift away from Thee."

Power is an inseparable quality of all great life.

> "To be weak is miserable."

But out of weakness we are made strong when we lose ourselves in the life of Him who is our Strength. Saint John, opening before us the windows of his celestial vision, lets us see, now "a strong angel," now "another mighty angel;" but their faces reveal no more self-conscious pride than is written upon the brow of the humblest messenger of God on earth. His power is their inspiration, and it is in His service that they have grown vigorous and great. They visit us on His errands, radiant with

His health, white-robed with His righteousness. And the message of these mighty ones to puny mortals is this: that they also are to arise and clothe themselves with the power of the Infinite God.

"Then, when they receive Him, a new inspiration is upon them; all their powers are exalted; a wondrous inconceivable energy is felt; and having come into the sense of God, which is the element of all real greatness, they discover, as it were in amazement, what it is to be in their true capacity. . . .

"These angels that excel in strength! these ancient princes and hierarchs that have grown up in God's eternity and unfolded their mighty powers in whole ages of good, recognize in us compeers that are finally to be advanced, as they are."

We hear men to-day asking themselves and each other whether they believe in immortality, while the power of an endless life is pressing all around and into them, a spiritual atmosphere. A man may be liv-

ing immortally without knowing it; which is far better than for him to assert his immortality without living it. Few of us can abide contentedly in our own littleness. The soul feels keenly her mortal limitations of outward circumstance and inward defect: she longs to escape from herself into God.

"Although we live petty and foolish lives, the knowledge that there is greatness and wisdom, the knowledge that there is God, is a far greater and more constant consolation to us than we know." It is a consolation, because it is an ever-present hope of release. It is impossible that one who loves God, or wholly impossible that one who loves Him in Christ, should be habitually narrow and petty and mean in his relations to others. To love Him is to share His life, to enter into the infiniteness of His love and power. When we are filled with all the fullness of God, we cannot help overflowing with it towards our fellow-beings. In giving ourselves, we give Him; for we have no life but His.

How can we stay shut up to our own little planning and scheming, when the ocean-currents of God's being are pressing in to flood us with His eternity? How can we be so little, when we were meant to be so great? How can we help calling to our neighbors who are stifling in their airless pinfolds, "Come out and float upon the seas of eternity! come, feel how great you are, how great the world is, how great and glorious is the God to whom you belong! Come and let us breathe together the full freedom of the infinite Life, — the life of Love, of truth, and of holiness, — and so be immortal together!"

And escaping out of ourselves, we leave our doors wide open to God. He enters into us, and makes a heaven of our souls. Every thought, every emotion glows and expands in His Presence. Now, for the first time, we learn what we are, and what we may become. We feel

> "The rapture mighty, measureless,
> In each eternal thing; —

The mingling with Almightiness;
The dwelling by Life's spring."

It is too true that circumstances are sometimes our unpitying jailors. We feel ourselves dwindling in our cells, with scarcely strength left to aspire towards freedom. — Room! room to breathe in, room to rest our cramped powers by putting them to noble uses! — is the piteous cry of many an unwilling prisoner, — a cry more appealing than even the wail of poverty.

"All tortured states
Suppose a straitened place. Jehovah, Lord,
Make room for rest around me! out of sight
Now float me, of the vexing land abhorred,
Till in deep calms of space my soul may right
Her nature, shoot large sail on lengthening cord,
And rush exultant on the Infinite."

But the circumscribed lot is not necessarily ignoble, nor the trivial duty mean. The only really small life is that which shuts God out; and there is no life so narrow or so low that its doors may not open to the inflowing grandeur of His Being. Yet sometimes we must wholly break down

the walls of our imprisoning self-content, and go forth, unsheltered wanderers, to seek Him in the wilderness. And truly seeking Him, there or anywhere, we shall find Him. Our dissatisfaction with ourselves is a proof that we belong to Him. Says an old writer: "In this is the excellency of man, that he is made capable of a communion with his Maker, and, because capable of it, is unsatisfied without it; the soul, being cut out to that largeness, cannot be satisfied with less."

Without a sense of the Infinite, we never come to a just knowledge of our own powers. The reason why our lives are so fragmentary and meaningless is that we live them as if they were our own lives only, and do not centre them in God. We must unite ourselves to the Greatest, if we would live in any great or glorious way. In union with the Strongest is our strength. By ourselves we are but units. In God we come into unity, into oneness with the Whole. The deepest prayer a human

being can breathe was uttered by the Psalmist centuries ago: "O knit my heart unto Thee!" The life that is knit to the Perfect, the Divine Life, however little it may be, is coherent and strong, and immortal.

XII.

The Joy of our Lord.

N the parable of the talents, the reward of the faithful servant was not a gift for himself, but the opportunity to do something for his Lord, something more and better than he had ever done before. And the best reward for any faithful work is the privilege of going on and proving our faithfulness with more difficult tasks. The servant likes to feel that he can trust himself even as he is trusted. And he becomes a stronger man for his loyalty to his master and to himself. "The faculty of doing good," it has been said, "by an eternal law, is multiplied and magnified according to the use which is made of it." Here, again, the grandeur of our destiny is suggested by our possibilities of development in noble personal character.

The happiest thing that can befall us is to have work given us that requires us to be true to ourselves, and that will count in large benefits to others. There is little pleasure in a daily routine of toil which could be performed just as well by anybody else; but there is abundant happiness in taking up tasks for which we have prepared ourselves, and which perhaps would never be as well done by another. In other words, it is a great privilege to find our own work, and to get leave to do it. It may be that this will be one of the satisfactions of the future life. We all have to do so many things that fret and irritate us here, it sometimes seems to us as if congenial work would be heaven.

And we cannot think that heaven means anything less than service. The sky above us might show us this; that which is "heaved up" over the clods we tread upon, with its wonderful mediations of cloud and sunshine, of rainbow and lightning and storm and dew. The air around us is

never at rest, but is constantly astir with the preparation of some new blessing for us. And earth takes the thought of the heavens into her bosom, and reproduces it in living plants and flowing streams, and tender green grass. All things God has made beautiful He has made for service also.

Our Lord has told us that His Father's life and His are, from the beginning, one unintermitting, infinite work. He came to us, "not to be ministered unto, but to minister." Did that ministry end when He cried out on the cross, "It is finished"? Have apostles and martyrs and all holy men and women down to our own time been doing merely a work of their own, or is it He himself, His Spirit in them, who has accomplished all good that is done in the world until now? If we believe in a living Christ, "the Son of Man who is in heaven," we must believe that He is still giving His loving service to the beings for whom He lived and died on earth; a

service inconceivably more glorious because it is now wholly a spiritual work.

His work was begun at the beginning of creation. He is "the Lamb that was slain from the foundation of the world." His life and death with us and for us were only such a glimpse of His eternal being and divine activity as could be made visible to our human eyes; only a segment of the infinite circle of His God-life. That work cannot be ended until heaven and earth shall pass away, until man no longer needs God: nay, we may say reverently, until God and man no longer need each other.

The life beyond the grave would be a blank to us, except for the hope of entering into ministries of love like His, with Him. We who have been of so little use to others here, we who have felt ourselves so hampered and hindered in our sincerest efforts by circumstances and by our own imperfections and mistakes, we should almost feel as if the future life were

going to be a failure, if we could not help our fellow-beings there more than we have helped them here. If the lesson of life is love, love like Christ's, we know that we have hardly begun to learn it yet. We can only know what eternity is, — what heaven is, — through the power of a life indissoluble from God's : —

> "God's glory passing into thee, —
> All heaven becoming thine!"

The endless life implies for us the illimitably unaccomplished. More and greater attainments will always be awaiting us, for beyond us He will be forever. "Let us climb to the height of our Alpine desires ; let us leave them behind us and ascend the spear-pointed Himalayas of our aspirations ; still shall we find the depth of God's sapphire above us ; still shall we find the heavens higher than the earth, and His thoughts and His ways higher than our thoughts and our ways."

Vistas and labyrinths of knowledge reach on before us. We cannot endure our igno-

rance, and are impatient to penetrate the hidden mysteries of the universe. But it is from the alphabet we learn here that we are to spell out lessons of eternal truth under heavenly teachers. We shall drop off our silly pedantries as we catch the charm of their holy simplicity, and shall become wiser as we become more childlike. "Knowledge is power," we have been taught to say; but as we go on, we shall change the proverb to "Wisdom is power;" for wisdom is knowledge illumined by love — knowledge that has found her soul.

Earth is a school-room; and heaven will be a school-room also for us who, through all eternity, must aspire to know more of God, and to penetrate truth which is ever deepening into the impenetrable. When we learn as they do in heaven, we shall learn not merely "for knowing's sake," not from curiosity or pride of acquisition, but for love; for the sake of giving what we have received. We can never comprehend the Infinite Love except through loving

infinitely. We are only then aware of our own greatness, when we feel the Divine Life flowing through ours.

"Human greatness," it has been said, "must be ultimately reducible to this: a quality in any man by which he is capable first of taking into himself, and then of distributing through himself to others, some part of the life of God."

This, then, is the grandeur of living, the power of our immortality, "the power of an endless life," to receive and radiate the life of God. Translated into the one great human Word, Christ, God revealed and given to man in His Son, it means sacrifice, the utter sacrifice of self for humanity's need. To know Him, through sharing in the spirit of His sacrifice, is to have entered into eternal life. We count our lives no longer by minutes and seconds, by days and years and æons, but by His infinite heart-throbs, pulsating through every fibre of our being, and so keeping the world warm for its desolate and wandering chil-

dren, our Father's family, for whom He lived and died. In Christ we are alive from the dead forevermore. In Him there is no death. The one true satisfaction of our souls, on earth or in heaven, is the awaking ever more and more perfectly into His likeness.

A good man has bidden us not to think of death as a sleep, but as a waking from sleep. "And," he says, "I do not know that death will be our last waking. I do not know but we may have deeper senses yet, which death may not touch and open. Perhaps we may have ranges of faculties, one within another, each with its own world and modes of being, so that we may keep waking up, stage after stage, to brighter realms, for ever and ever away towards God, the central life and glory of all. Who shall say that we may not to all eternity, at some of its stages, die to a more outward life and wake up to a more inward and real one? that after we have lived out the life of one world faithfully, a new one

will open more brightly and objectively, where there is a higher order of existence, and God reveals Himself in diviner splendor — all coming from the successive waking up into intenser life of faculties that sleep already within us?"

A glorious conjecture, perhaps a prophecy. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be." But this is a certainty: that

"There is no death to those who know of Life," —

the endless, limitless life of love and power wherein man is indissolubly one with God.

We are not left in doubt. "His servants shall serve Him," is foretold concerning the glorified inhabitants of the Holy City. And how can they serve Him so well as by helping their brethren and His? "His name shall be in their foreheads." His name is "The Saviour;" and they who bear His name are to be saviours and helpers also.

Though we may hereafter come to regions in the spiritual world where there is

no more sin, there will always be different grades of being, different degrees of development, the need of the lower to learn from the higher, and the higher from the lower as well. Can any of us imagine ourselves in a possible future condition or situation where we shall no longer need the suggestions of friendship, the guidance of greater natures than ours, the aid of loving human souls like our own? No: even in heaven we shall have our mutual needs. There, as here, we shall reach out for the strong hand of brotherly help in ascending to spiritual heights.

In shutting none out of our sympathy, in the willingness to help all and to be helped by all, we are here beginning, like children, to climb the foothills that lead us upward to immortality; we already breathe joyfully the air of the unseen kingdom. It is folly for us to think that we shall be at home in heaven, if we find its air too pure for our breathing here. The self-absorbed, the unsympathetic, the unloving, have lost

their way, and are on the downward path. No light of the eternal life is reflected from their faces. But when, at last, we shall have cast aside the worn-out rags of our selfishness, and, turning our eyes and our feet upward, are clothed upon and winged with love, on the heavenly heights, who shall guess to what new meanings sympathy and comradeship and helpfulness may grow? These are the things which it hath not entered into the heart of man to conceive.

Yes, service is the law of the heavenly life, and heartily entering into it, we enter into joy, — the joy of our Lord.

To enter into His joy! It means freedom and shelter, and communion. It includes all the hospitalities of earth and of heaven. To be welcomed into every room in our Father's house, — to blend our life as music with the harmonies of His universe, — to be at peace forever, forever at one with the onward movement of His holy and glorious Will! To feel ourselves each a

part of the vast unity of things visible and invisible, — to be permitted to do something towards drawing all things together in Him, — to help Him in shaping the new heaven and the new earth, — to know that nothing exists that is not an element of His joy and ours! This it is to be at home in the New Jerusalem — "built as a city that is at unity in itself."

It is the joy of *our* Lord.

Not man only, but the whole created universe, through every nerve and tissue of its life, will blend itself in the chorus of the new song. Nature will be at one with us, as we are at one with God. Blind and dumb as she seems now, she will share with us in the clear vision and the overflowing praise. Like the beasts in the Apocalypse, "full of eyes within," she will join with worshiping saints and elders and angels round about the Throne, in gratitude to Him who has found nothing that his Father created too mean for Him to redeem.

"And every creature which is in heaven

and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb forever and ever."

In saying "our Lord," "our brethren," "our world," we take in nothing less than the whole. Imperfect, incoherent, disjointed without Him, the whole body is "complete in Him."

A child of God who is not glad in simply being alive, and in doing the work He has appointed, is an anomaly. It is as if a sunbeam should frown back upon the sun for sending it forth to illumine the world; or as if a color in the rainbow should darken and grow dim because it must take its place in building the heavenly arch. Joy is the smile of Being; the natural expression of the soul's delight in receiving and giving. Pleasure, delight, happiness, these are all shallow experiences, in comparison with joy. They stir us at the surface:

this is an elemental quality, welling up from the abysses of the soul.

"Your joy no man taketh from you," Christ said to his disciples; and He was speaking of the greatest sorrow of their lives, which was yet to reveal itself to them as a joy. "These things I speak, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves." His joy was the sacrifice He was making of himself; and theirs was to come through entering in to the spirit of His sacrifice when He should have gone out of their sight.

The simple gladnesses of life Christ also shared as naturally as we may share them. The fields of His native land bloomed for none so sweetly as for Him whose creative vision discerned all that there was

"Of splendor in the grass, of glory in the flower."

He loved little children; watched them at their innocent sports, took them in His arms and blessed them, and was happy in their happiness. The peace of home-life

sank into His heart; and He welcomed the sweetness of love from stranger or from friend, with gracious and sympathetic gladness. His Father's world was all a delight to Him: but His joy of joys was that He could save its ungrateful souls from the sorrow of their sins by the gift of Himself. To enter into this deepest joy of His is to enter heaven.

The souls that walk white-robed there, are the souls of those who, with Him, have laid down their lives for the saving of other lives. So are their garments washed white in the blood of the Lamb. And in the spirit of that sacrifice they go on, from glory to glory. They cannot cease from giving themselves; it has become the habit of their entire being. They are full of the light of their Lord's love, and they must forever radiate His blessedness. Wherever they are needed in His universe, they go forth, swifter than sunbeams, on His errands. To be with Him in His heaven, is not only to have lost all selfishness,

but to know no joy in life except in giving that life forth continually to others.

"I looked, and behold, a door was opened in heaven." A door, — swinging back on musical hinges before the discouraged wanderers of earth, inviting them to hospitalities glimpsed beyond, inconceivable to the heart of man. A door? Those are not unfolding portals, they are outspread arms, and above them is the glory of a Face, and from within there floats the tenderness of a Voice, —

"I am the Door!"

It is He, the Lord of Life Himself: and we, who were so weary of our vain efforts to conquer the evil, the pettiness and unlovingness of our natures, are uplifted, upborne to His heart, and its mighty throbbings become the inspiration of our own. He does for us what we could not do for ourselves, and we are saved. Henceforth there is no life for us but His.

"I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it." To every soul

of man this message comes, and the soul that turns at the call of the angel who brings it, will bear witness that the message is true. Only we ourselves can shut ourselves out of heaven. The door of a Heart as human in its sympathy as it is divine in its love and power, stands always open and waiting with welcome for the repentant child who would fain return to his Father's house.

"By me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture."

"He shall go in and out." The children of the kingdom have the freedom of the universe. No narrow enclosure shuts them away from their brethren of distant ages and different faiths and races. To them none are strangers and foreigners. They are at home with all the inhabitants of earth and of heaven. They do not know each other as Greek or Barbarian, as Jew or Gentile, as mortal or angel, but as the children of God.

They may rest beside the still waters of human affection, and they may climb the loftiest heights of knowledge and speculation. They may laugh with the child and think with the philosopher. Theirs are the poet's songs; and theirs the discoveries of the man of science. They sing with the woman at her wheel, or whistle with the farmer at his plow, and they catch from that healthy mirth a note of reverent praise that they carry up to heaven and blend with the chant of the seraphim. Unlike the dwellers in the elder Paradise, they have right to all fruits that grow on the tree of knowledge or the tree of life. Nothing is forbidden to them, for they want nothing that God does not desire them to possess. They have entered into life by the one only Way, through the heart and mind and soul of Christ. Overcoming their sins in His strength, and becoming one with Him in love and purity and righteousness, they "inherit all things," both in this world and in the world to come.

We have as yet only partially come into possession of our earthly inheritance. Our own bodies and souls are still a mystery to us. Nature sometimes seems to inveigle us into inextricable entanglements. Our fellow-beings often appear strange, distant, and unrelated; and our future is hidden from us by an impenetrable veil. Yet all these things belong to us, and to all these we belong. As we enter into life, we shall comprehend more and more joyfully the truth that all things are ours, because in Christ we are one with all.

We shall never inclose the Infinite within our finite grasp, but we shall lay hold upon it more and more firmly as we go on. The Infinite One must draw us onward towards Himself forever. The beauty and the glory of the immortal life is that it is an eternal entering in. Ever shall we be penetrating into new mysteries, ever aroused by nobler enthusiasms to loftier undertakings, ever enfolded by purer affections, ever forming holier alliances, ever

taken deeper and deeper into the heart of Christ, into the fathomless abysses of the love of God!

As it is in heaven, so may it now begin to be on earth! O soul, be faithful in thy few things, and He will make thee ruler over many things! "Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord!"

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